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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Palestinian death toll tops 50,000 amid Israel attacks

DEIR AL-BALAH, 23 MARCH

Gaza's Health Ministry says more than 50,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israel-Hamas war. The ministry says more than 1,13,000 have been wounded. The latest toll announced on Sunday includes 673 people killed since Israel ended the ceasefire last week with a surprise wave of airstrikes. *—PTI*

Sambhal mosque chief held for 24 Nov violence

Zafar Ali, Jama Masjid Sadar Chief and the Shahi Mosque Committee Chief, being

SAMBHAL, 23 MARCH

Shahi Jama Masjid committee president Zafar Ali was arrested on Sunday in connection with the violence that erupted here in November last year over a court-ordered survey of the mosque, a police officer said. Ali's brother, however, alleged that it was done to prevent him from submitting his testimony before a three-member judicial commission on Monday. Earlier in the day, officials said the mosque committee chief was taken into custody by the local police's special investigation team (SIT) to record his statement in connection with the 24 November violence case. *—PTI*

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JD(S) won't back BJP against 4% Muslim quota

JD(S) claims Supremo HD Deve Gowda had introduced the 4% quota for Muslims

BENGALURU 23 MARCH

JD(S) has decided not to support its alliance partner, BJP, in the latter's protest against the four per cent reservation for Muslims in government tenders.

The decision was taken at a JD(S) meeting held in Bengaluru on Saturday, where party leaders directed their legislators to refrain from participating in the BJP's agitation. The party leadership has also instructed its floor leader in the Legislative Assembly, Suresh Babu, to convey this stance clearly when questioned by the media.

Sources within the JD(S) confirmed the development and stated, "We will not compromise on our party's ideology and principles. We stand with BJP on issues such as price hikes, unfulfilled guarantees, maladministration, and corruption. However, former Prime Minister and JD(S) Supremo HD Deve Gowda had introduced the four per cent reservation for Muslims, and we cannot support the BJP's protest against it."

Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka responded to JD(S)' stance, saying that BJP would attempt to convince its ally. "They should join the protest," Ashoka remarked.

Meanwhile, BJP State President BY Vijayendra announced on Saturday that the party would launch a statewide public awareness campaign to educate Hindus on what he termed as "injustice meted out to them by the Congress."

"Muslim reservation is unconstitutional. We will take this fight against the Congress to its logical conclusion," Vijayendra said.

Reacting to the suspension of 18 BJP MLAs from the Legislative Assembly for six months, Ashoka criticised the move, stating that a party delegation would meet the Speaker to seek a reversal of the suspension.

"Are our MLAs terrorists? During a debate, instead of supporting us, the Speaker chose to suspend our lawmakers. We will appeal to him to reconsider the decision," Ashoka added. *—Salar News*

Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah meets AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge in Bengaluru days after Assembly passed a bill proposing reservation for Muslims in contracts awarded by the government. JD(S) led by HD Kumaraswamy and BY Vijayendra's BJP joined hands in 2023 ahead of Assembly polls ***PHOTOS: SALAR/PTI***

SKM calls for pan-India protest on 28 March

Punjab Police had detained Pandher, Dallewal and several farmer leaders in Mohali on Wednesday ***PHOTO: ANI***

CHANDIGARH, 23 MARCH

Hitting out at Punjab Police's crackdown on the protesting farmers, national coordination committee of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) has called upon farmers across India to hold demonstrations across the country on 28 March.

"The National Coordination Committee of SKM calls upon the farmers across India to hold protest demonstrations at districts across India on March 28 against the Police repression on farmers' protest in Punjab," the farmer's union said in statement on Sunday said.

The SKM also urged all the farmer organisations and platforms, including Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) and SKM (Non Political), to join issue based unity and come forward "to unite against repression".

- The SKM also urged all the farmer organisations, including KMM, to join issue based unity and come forward "to unite against repression".

Punjab Police had detained Pandher, Dallewal and several farmer leaders in Mohali on Wednesday as they were returning after a meeting with a central delegation led by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Chandigarh where they had discussed various demands of the farmers, especially a law guaranteeing minimum support price (MSP) for crops. As the departing farmers entered Mohali after the meeting, they were met with heavy barricading and some of their leaders were detained. Meanwhile, senior farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallwal, who along with several farmer leaders was detained on Wednesday, was on Sunday shifted from Jalandhar to Patiala. *—PTI*

CJI sets up panel to probe cash at judge's home

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

In an unprecedented move, the Supreme Court uploaded on its website the inquiry report of Delhi High Court Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya complete with photos and videos, related to the alleged discovery of substantial amount of cash from the residence of Justice Yashwant Varma and ordered that no judicial work will be assigned to him.

A video shared by the police commissioner of burnt wads of cash at Justice Yashwant Varma's residence and preliminary findings of the Delhi High Court chief justice calling for a "deeper probe" have prompted Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna to constitute a committee to conduct an in-house inquiry into the allegations against the judge.

"Accordingly, I am of the prima facie opinion that the entire matter warrants a deeper probe," Justice Upadhyaya has said in his report dated 21 March and made public on Saturday evening.

The three-member inquiry committee formed by the CJI consists of Justices Sheel Nagu (Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court), GS Sandhawalia (Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court) and Karnataka High Court judge Anu Sivaraman.

"The Chief Justice of the High Court of Delhi for the time being has been asked not to assign any judicial work to Mr Justice Yashwant Varma," the top court said in a statement on Saturday.

Justice Varma has, in his response, strongly denounced the allegations in the currency-discovery row and said no cash was ever placed in the storeroom either by him or any of his family members and it was a conspiracy to malign him. *—PTI*

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Irfan snubbed from IPL commentary over personal bias

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan will not be a part of the commentary team for this year's Indian Premier League (IPL) season.

Pathan was reportedly ignored for the role after being accused of bias and taking "pot-shots" at specific groups of players.

Since his retirement from the sport, Irfan has been a regular member of the commentary panel in the IPL, becoming one of the most recognisable voices of the game.

According to a report in the Times of India (TOI), Irfan has been snubbed from the panel as the "broadcasters were not happy with him bringing in personal grudges on-air and even on his social media handle. Pathan had a fallout with a couple of players a few years ago. Since then, he has not shied away from referring to them aggressively." *—Agencies*

WITH RAIN COMES DESTRUCTION

A huge tree got uprooted in Bengaluru's JC Road on Sunday following rains on Saturday. The downpour on Saturday – the City's first this year – again exposed Bengaluru's fragile infra, leaving several parts of the City inundated. The heavy rain, accompanied by gusty winds, led to waterlogging, tree falls & power outages ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

SHOT IN STORE

Indian man, daughter killed in US shooting

NEW YORK, 23 MARCH

A 56-year-old Indian-origin man and his 24-year-old daughter were shot dead at a convenience store in Accomack County in US state of Virginia and police have arrested one person, according to media reports.

On receiving reports of shooting, Accomack County Sheriff's office said deputies were called to the scene shortly and found Pradipkumar Patel and his daughter Urmi had suffered gunshot wounds.

While the father had already died daughter was rushed to the hospital but succumbed to injuries there. Accomack County Sheriffs announced late Thursday that they arrested George Frazier Devon Wharton, 44, of Onancock in connection with the shooting.

Gujarat natives Paresh Patel, his wife Hansaben and their daughter Urmi (in pic) moved to the US six years ago; Inset: Accused George Wharton ***PHOTO: X***

Wharton is currently held in Accomack Jail without bond, according to Sheriff W Todd Wessells.

He was charged with first-degree murder, attempted first-degree murder, possession of a firearm by a felon and two counts of use of a firearm in the commission of a felony. Paresh Patel, who identified himself as the owner of the store, said both victims were his family members.

"My cousin's wife and her dad were working this morning and some guy come here and they just shot," the TV station quoted Paresh as saying.

"I don't know what to do." Patel, his wife Hansaben and their daughter Urmi are from Gujarat's Mehsana and moved to the US six years ago. *—PTI*

Curfew lifted in Nagpur after 6 days

NAGPUR, 23 MARCH

The curfew imposed in Nagpur, Maharashtra, following violent incidents on 17 March has been lifted in the four affected areas as of Sunday, six days after unrest erupted. The disturbances led to curfews being implemented in multiple police station jurisdictions, including Kotwali, Ganeshpeth, Tehsil, and Lakadganj, among others.

The violence ignited on 17 March amid unfounded rumours that a 'chadar' inscribed with holy texts had been burned during protests by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal, demanding the removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb in the Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district. Following the unrest, curfew restrictions were gradually lifted, with Nandanvan and Kapil Nagar areas freed on 20 March, followed by Pachpaoli, Shanti Nagar, Lakadganj, Sakkardara, and Imambada on 22 March. *—PTI*

Police personnel conduct a route march amid curfew during the holy month of Ramadan, near Jama Masjid in Nagpur on Sunday ***PHOTO: PTI***

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PHOTO: XXX

Cop suspended for trying to dupe jeweller

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

City Police Commissioner B Dayananda has suspended a sub-inspector attached to the Cottonpet police station for allegedly duping a complainant. Sources said Sub-Inspector PG Santosh is facing a case of cheating, criminal breach of trust and intimidation, based on a complaint filed by Dhananjay Shyam Rao Mali, a jeweller. Santosh, who was posted at Halasuru Gate police station in 2020, allegedly visited Dhananjay's jewellery shop on City Street Road under the pretext of examining gold seized in another case. He allegedly took 950 grams of gold, valued at Rs 64 lakh, promising to return it the same evening.—*Salar News*

3 killed in separate Chamarajanagar road accidents

MYSURU, 23 MARCH

Three bike riders were killed on the spot and another one person was critically injured when they hit another vehicle in Chamarajanagar district in two separate incidents on Sunday. Two bike riders Abhishek 23, Abhi 21 were killed on the spot, another person Madhesh 21 was seriously injured when their bike collided against a Canter Van near Haradanahalli in Chamarajanagar on Saturday late night. All the three are banana plantation workers from the same village. Traffic Police rushed to the spot, registered a case and investigation is underway while Madhesh is being treated for critical injuries in a hospital. In another incident, a bike rider Nagashetty 40 was killed on the spot when he rammed into a car which hit an electric pole after impact on a road between in Gundlupet taluk of Chamarajanagar district on Sunday. The car driver is missing. — *Salar News*

Decomposed body of missing man found near Mysuru

MYSURU, 23 MARCH

A decomposed body of an 80-year-old man found dead suspected to be trampled to death at Chikkahalathur village in Hanur taluk of Chamarajanagar district. Ten days after a missing person complaint filed by his family, the body of deceased Madashetty was found in a decomposed state in the woods. According to the complaint, Madashetty who went to graze cattle to nearby woods in the village did not return home on 12 March in the evening even though cattles he was grazing returned to the village. The Police initiated a search following a missing complaint. The passerby who noticed the decomposed body of a man on Saturday near the village forests, alerted the family members and police. Upon inspection of the spot by Ramapura Police and forest department personnel, a case has been registered. —*Salar News*

Sandalwood seized from shops in Mysuru

MYSURU, 23 MARCH

The Forest Mobile Squad has seized sandalwood and red sandal products kept for sale illegally at four silk saree showrooms and handicraft shops in Mysuru on Saturday. The two teams – one led by DCF Chandrashekar Gowda Patil and the other led by ACF C Rudresh – seized 249 sandalwood logs weighing 15.83kg, 537 red sandalwood logs weighing 25.905 kg, 4.680 kg sandalwood powder, 730grams of sandalwood pieces and 5.2kg red sandalwood powder. Cases have been registered against the shop owners under the Karnataka Forest Act 1963 and Karnataka Forest Rules 1969. Forest Department said no shop is licensed to sell sandalwood products and appealed to the public to buy them from Sandalwood Treasury. — *Salar News*

DOWNPOUR BARES BENGALURU'S CIVIC FLAWS

Waterlogging, tree falls, power outages return to Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The downpour on Saturday evening – the City's first this year – has once again exposed Bengaluru's fragile infrastructure, leaving several parts of the city inundated. The heavy rain, accompanied by gusty winds, led to waterlogging, tree falls, power outages and an accident that killed two persons, including a three-year-old girl.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Bengaluru City received 11.8mm of rainfall, while the Kempegowda International Airport Limited (KIAL) station recorded 38.6mm. The downpour is expected to continue for the next few days as pre-monsoon activity intensifies across the state.

The heavy rain also impacted flight operations at KIAL, with several flights bound for Bengaluru being diverted to Chennai due to adverse weather conditions. Airport officials confirmed that they are closely monitoring the situation and providing timely updates.

The rain's aftermath was visible on Sunday morning, with fallen trees obstructing traffic in Koramangala and JC Road. Water logging at Central Silk Board, Kogilu Cross, Ramamurthy Nagar, Kasturi Nagar, KR Puram and Hebbal caused traffic congestion.

Officials at the BBMP said there were reports of 25 whole trees collapsing and 75 cases of branches falling in eight zones.

Yelahanka, which recorded up to 50 mm of rainfall, was the worst hit, with cases of 12 trees and 40 branches falling.

The Bengaluru Electricity Supply Company (Bescom) received more than 78,000 distress calls about power cuts lasting from two to seven hours in areas, such as Hebbal, Basaveshwara Nagar and HSR Layout. Many residents also complained that they could not reach the 1912 helpline.

A three-year-old girl was killed near DJ Halli park when a branch of a tree fell on her head as she was travelling with her father, Shakti Prasad, on a bike around 8.30pm. She was rushed to Bowring Hospital but died on the way. —*Salar News*

A huge tree got uprooted on JC Road in Bengaluru on Sunday following rain on Saturday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

RSS leader Dattatreya Hosabale addresses attendees on the final day of RSS programme in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Religion-based reservation violates Constitution: RSS

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

Amid the ongoing debate over the Karnataka government's decision to provide a four per cent reservation for Muslims in government contracts, RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale on Sunday asserted that the Constitution does not allow religion-based quota. He also said such reservations go against the architect of our Constitution, B R Ambedkar.

Addressing reporters here on the concluding day of Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha, the highest decision making body of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Hosabale said, "Religion-based reservation is not accepted in the Constitution authored by Babasaheb Ambedkar. Anybody doing it is going against the wishes of the architect of our Constitution."

He also pointed out that previous attempts by erstwhile Undivided Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra to introduce religion-based reservations for Muslims were set aside by the High Courts and Supreme Court. Responding to a query about the controversy over 17th century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's grave in Maharashtra, Hosabale remarked that Aurangzeb was made an icon and not his brother Dara Shikoh, who believed in social harmony. People who went against the ethos of India were made icons, he said. Hosabale lauded figures like Rajput king Maharana Pratap for resisting Mughal emperor Akbar and said those who resisted invaders were also "freedom fighters".

Asked if the RSS believed that it should convey its views to the Centre on certain matters, Hosabale said there is no necessity now. To a query on the appointment of a new BJP national president, the RSS general secretary said the Sangh does not interfere in the party's internal matters. Commenting on the Sangh's idea of 'One Nation, One Culture', Hosabale said it draws inspiration from India's rich cultural heritage and ethos.

"A person who tried to destroy this country and its cultural identity will remain an outsider," he said. —*PTI*

RSS to build organised Hindu society

The RSS passed a resolution to build a "harmonious and organised Hindu society" for world peace and prosperity at its Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha, its highest decision-making body, on Sunday. RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat, General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale, BJP President JP Nadda, BJP General Secretary BL Santhosh and heads of 32 outfits affiliated to the RSS participated in the three-day event that concluded on Sunday. —*PTI*

'Annamalai's words do not matter'

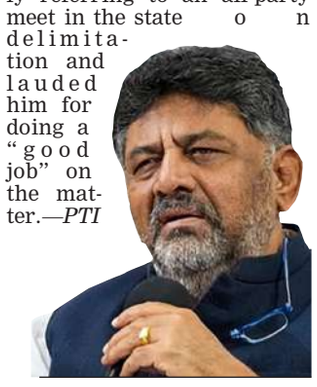
CHENNAI, 23 MARCH

The claims made by BJP Tamil Nadu president K Annamalai over Parliamentary delimitation not affecting the southern states do not matter and it is the words of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister that count, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Sunday. Speaking to reporters here before departing for Bengaluru, the Karnataka Congress chief also took a jibe at Annamalai, saying he was "being loyal to the party" and not to Tamil Nadu.

"Annamalai is not important here, it is important what the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) and the Home Minister (Amit Shah) are conveying to the country. Poor Annamalai doesn't know anything," he said. "He is just doing his job, he wanted to show more loyalty to his party.... he is not showing loyalty to his state, he is showing loyalty to his party," Shivakumar charged.

The Deputy CM was here to attend the 'Fair Delimitation' meeting convened by DMK President and TN Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday where they demanded a freeze on parliamentary constituencies for another 25 years based on the 1971 census. While Shah has maintained that the delimitation done on pro rata basis will not affect south Indian states, the Southern states have said their proportional representation in such a method will be affected and those who successfully implemented population control measures would be punished.

Shivakumar further said Stalin had taken into 'confidence' over 50 political parties in the state earlier, apparently referring to an all-party meet in the state on delimitation and lauded him for doing a "good job" on the matter.—*PTI*



MAN KILLED IN DRUNKEN BRAWL

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

A 37-year-old real estate businessman, Loknath Singh, was killed in a drunken brawl in BGS Layout on Saturday evening. The accused, believed to be known to Singh, attacked him with sharp weapons after an argument escalated. Despite fleeing to an under-construction building, Singh was pursued and fatally assaulted. Police suspect financial disputes or personal enmity, possibly involving a woman, as motives for the crime. Singh, a native of Kuduru in Magadi taluk, had political connections in the region. The Soladevanahalli police have formed five special teams to track down the attackers. —*Salar News*

3.5L RESIDENTS OWE BBMP RS 390 CRORE IN PROPERTY TAX

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) is grappling with a substantial backlog in property tax recovery, with 3.49 lakh of the total 20.5 lakh property owners defaulting payments. The civic organisation's Special Commissioner (Revenue) Munish Moudgil said these defaulters owe Rs 390 crore to the city.

Of the defaulters, 1.73 lakh residents are classified as "chronic non-payers", who have not paid their taxes for several years.

Another 1.76 lakh property owners have defaulted payments only for the current financial year – 2024–25.

Despite numerous efforts, including notices, SMS reminders, IVRS calls and even personal visits, these defaulters have failed to comply, Moudgil said.

The BBMP had also introduced a "one-time settlement" scheme to help citizens to clear their dues, but the defaulters continued to neglect the measures.

"These individuals have persistently evaded their tax obligations, undermining the fairness of the system. Allowing them to continue without consequences is unjust to the honest taxpayers who duly pay their dues," Moudgil said.

Anyone protecting the defaulters is acting against the interests of the 90 per cent of citizens who consistently meet their tax responsibilities, Moudgil said.

The BBMP urges the public to extend their cooperation, Moudgil said. —*Salar News*

EVERY PHOTO TELLS A STORY

Labour Minister Santosh Lad takes a look at a photograph of **Salar Digital English Daily** during the inauguration of a photo gallery and award presentation programme by the Media Academy in Hubballi **PHOTO: SALAR**

BJP's Shettar urges Speaker to withdraw suspension of MLAs

HUBBALI, 23 MARCH

BJP MP Jagadish Shettar said on Sunday termed the suspension of 18 BJP MLAs from the state assembly for six months as "undemocratic" and urged the speaker to withdraw the order.

He also appealed to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to initiate the withdrawal of the suspension order.

According to Shettar, the MLAs were protesting against the 4 per cent Muslim quota bill and the honey trap scam. They claimed the government wasn't responding adequately, prompting a peaceful protest. Shettar emphasised that the protest wasn't against the speaker's post, but rather a call for accountability.

A major controversy erupted in Karnataka after 18 BJP MLAs were suspended on Friday from the state assembly for six months. The suspension was imposed by Speaker UT Khader. —*ANI*

EMPLOYS 7,000 IN INDIA

Boeing lays off 180 employees in B'luru amid global job cuts

BENGALURU, 23 MARCH

US aircraft manufacturer Boeing has laid off approximately 180 employees at its Engineering Technology Centre in Bengaluru as part of a global workforce reduction initiative, according to sources. Boeing, which employs around 7,000 staff in India—a crucial market for the firm—has faced various global challenges.

Last year, Boeing announced a global workforce cut of about 10 per cent. The insider revealed that the layoffs at the Boeing India Engineering Technology Center occurred during the December quarter of 2024. Although there has been no official statement from Boeing, the source indicated that strategic adjustments were undertaken that affected a limited number of positions, ensuring no detrimental impact on customer service or government operations.

While some roles have been eliminated, the company has also created new positions, maintaining a measured approach to reductions in India with a focus on sustaining customer service, safety, and quality standards. The Boeing India Engineering & Technology Center (BIETC) in Bengaluru and Chennai is responsible for complex advanced aerospace projects. Boeing's wholly-owned engineering and technology campus in Bengaluru represents one of its largest investments outside the United States. Furthermore, the company sources approximately USD 1.25 billion annually from more than 300 suppliers in India, as stated on its website. —*PTI*

IFTAR PARTY IN BENGALURU

Housing Minister BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan with AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan attend Iftar organised by MLA NA Haris at Shanti Nagar in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: SALAR**

AIMPLB announces nationwide protest against Waqf Bill

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) on Sunday announced a nationwide agitation against the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, with large sit-ins planned in front of the state assemblies in Patna and Vijayawada on March 26 and 29, respectively, as part of the first phase of the protest. AIMPLB spokesperson SQR Ilyas said leaders from JD(U), RJD, Congress and Lok Janshakti Party, including Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, have been invited in Patna. The Bill was referred to the joint committee last August, following its introduction in the Lok Sabha by Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FB

Sena leader alleges Bangladesh link to Nagpur violence

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Nirupam has alleged that individuals with links to Bangladesh were involved in the recent violence in Nagpur. Speaking at a press conference, Nirupam claimed that the violence was "pre-meditated" and part of a larger conspiracy. The violence erupted in Nagpur on 17 March, after rumors spread about a 'chadar' with religious inscriptions being burnt during protests. Clashes resulted in widespread stone-pelting and arson, leaving 33 police personnel injured. Nirupam alleged that one of the individuals arrested was using social media to fund "Mujahideen activities". He criticized the opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) for its perceived alignment with groups deemed as instigators of the violence. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis stated that it was too early to comment on a foreign or Bangladeshi link to the violence, as the probe was underway. *—PTI*

AAP picks Italia for Visavadar assembly bypoll

AHMEDABAD, 23 MARCH

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has named Gopal Italia as its candidate for the upcoming Visavadar assembly bypoll in Gujarat. The announcement comes after the Gujarat High Court paved the way for the by-election by disposing of an election petition filed by BJP leader Harshad Ribadiya. The Visavadar seat has been vacant since December, 2023 when Bhupendra Bhayani resigned as the AAP MLA and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The AAP's core team in Gujarat is set to meet party national convener Arvind Kejriwal in New Delhi to discuss strategy for the upcoming assembly elections. Italia, an advocate by profession, has been an active member of the AAP and has fought for farmers' rights and against corruption in Gujarat. The Election Commission is yet to announce the date for the by-election. *—PTI*

YSRCP man, IPS officer booked for extortion in Andhra

AMARAVATI, 23 MARCH

A prominent YSRCP leader, Vidadala Rajini, and senior IPS officer P Joshua have been booked by Andhra Pradesh's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) for allegedly extorting over over Rs 2.2crore from a stone-crushing business owner. The alleged extortion occurred during the previous YSRCP regime, under the guise of vigilance inspections. Rajini's assistant, AD Ramakrishna, reportedly demanded RS 5 crore from the business owner, followed by an unauthorized inspection by Joshua. The business owner ultimately paid Rs 2.2crore. The ACB has registered a case under Prevention of Corruption Act. *—PTI*

Bihar Muslim body boycotts Nitish's 'iftar'

The body accused CM of contradicting his promise of a secular rule that protects minority rights

PATNA, 23 MARCH

A prominent Muslim organisation in Bihar, Imarat Shariah, has declined an invitation to attend an 'iftar' event hosted by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, citing his support for the Waqf Bill as the reason for their protest.

In a strongly-worded letter, Imarat Shariah expressed its disappointment with Kumar's alliance with the BJP and his backing of the Waqf Bill, which they believe is unconstitutional and illogical. The organisation accused Kumar of contradicting his initial promise of a secular rule that protects minority rights.

"We had expected a secular government that would protect minority rights, but your alliance with the BJP and support for the Waqf Bill have belied those expectations," the letter stated.

Imarat Shariah also described the 'iftar' event organised by the Chief Minister as "tokenism", stating that his government's indifference towards Muslim concerns renders such events meaningless.

Imarat Shariah expressed its disappointment with Bihar CM Nitish Kumar's alliance with the BJP and his backing of the Waqf Bill *PHOTO: PTI*

"This 'iftar' event is nothing but a token gesture, aimed at appeasing the Muslim community. But we will not be swayed by such tokenism," the organization said.

This development comes ahead of assembly polls in Bihar later this year. The state's Muslim population is a significant vote bank, and the Imarat Shariah's decision to boycott the 'iftar' event could have implications for Kumar's party.

Union Minister Chirag Paswan has also weighed in on the issue, protesting against Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind's decision to boycott the 'Iftaar' party organized by the Lok Janshakti Party president. Paswan defended his party's commitment to protecting Muslim interests and questioned the ability of rival parties to do the same.

"I urge Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind to reconsider their decision. We have always stood by the Muslim community and will continue to do so," Paswan said. The controversy surrounding the 'iftar' event has highlighted the complexities of Muslim politics in Bihar, where different organizations and parties are vying for influence and support. *—PTI*

- Imarat Shariah also described the 'iftar' event organised by the Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar as "tokenism", stating that his government's indifference towards Muslim concerns renders such events meaningless

'NON-SERIOUS CM' POSTER APPEARS OUTSIDE RABRI'S HOME

PATNA, 23 MARCH

A poster criticising Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has appeared outside former Chief Minister Rabri Devi's residence in Patna. The poster reads, "The non-serious Chief Minister," amidst a controversy surrounding Kumar's behavior during the national anthem.

A video surfaced showing Kumar talking and gesturing while the national anthem was played during a function in Patna. RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav shared the video on social media, criticising Kumar for disrespecting the national anthem and questioning his mental stability.

He demanded Kumar apologise to the nation and resign as Chief Minister. Other RJD leaders, including Misa Bharti and Rabri Devi, condemned Kumar's actions, with Bharti raising concerns about his mental and physical health.

The controversy has sparked a political furor, with opposition leaders calling for Kumar's resignation. RJD leader Rabri Devi criticised Kumar, demanding he apologise in both houses of the State for insulting the national anthem.

The incident highlights ongoing tensions in Bihar politics. The controversy surrounding Kumar's behavior during the national anthem has become a rallying point for opposition parties, further exacerbating the political divide in the state. *—ANI*

Constitutional values vital for peace in Manipur: Justice Singh

IMPHAL, 23 MARCH

Supreme Court Judge, Justice N Kotiswar Singh, has underscored the significance of adhering to the Constitution in overcoming the challenges faced by the state of Manipur. Speaking at a function marking the 12th anniversary of the Manipur High Court, Justice Singh emphasised that Constitution provides guidance on navigating difficult times.

Manipur, a small state in northeastern India, has been grappling with various challenges, including ethnic violence that has resulted in the loss of over 250 lives and displaced thousands since May 2023. Against this backdrop, Justice Singh's remarks assume great significance.

A delegation of Supreme Court judges, led by justice BR Gavai, recently visited Manipur, where they interacted with internally displaced persons and inaugurated a legal services camp, medical camp, and legal aid clinic in Churachandpur district. Justice Singh noted that during their visit, the team witnessed optimism among the people, particularly in Churachandpur and Bishnupur districts.

Security personnel with arms & ammunition recovered during a search operation and area domination in Kangpokpi district *PHOTO: PTI*

SC judges' visit comes as Manipur continues to grapple with ethnic violence and displacement, the emphasis on adhering to the Constitution and upholding its values assumes great importance. *—PTI*

Indian Election Commission dysfunctional: Kapil Sibal

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Kapil Sibal, a prominent Rajya Sabha MP, has launched a scathing attack on the Election Commission of India, branding it a "dysfunctional" and "failed institution". Sibal's remarks come amidst allegations of widespread irregularities in voter lists, including suspicious additions, deletions, and duplicate voter ID numbers.

The former congress leader expressed his deep concern that a significant proportion of the public has lost faith in the Election Commission, citing its failure to discharge its constitutional responsibilities. Sibal emphasized that urgent action is required to address this crisis of confidence, warning that the integrity of India's democratic processes is at stake.

Kapil Sibal *PHOTO: FB*

"The Election Commission is a dysfunctional body," Sibal declared. "It has not discharged its functions in accordance with its responsibilities under the Constitution. The quicker we deal with this issue, the greater the chance of saving democracy."

Sibal's comments were echoed by other opposition leaders, who have been vocal about their concerns regarding the Election Commission's handling of voter lists. The Congress party has been at the forefront of these allegations, claiming that the Commission has failed to address widespread irregularities in voter rolls.

In response to these allegations, the Election Commission has announced plans to hold all-party meetings to resolve pending polling booth-level issues. Additionally, the Commission plans to explore linking voter cards with Aadhaar and involving birth and death registration authorities to clean up voter rolls.

However, Sibal remains skeptical about the Commission's ability to address these issues, citing its past failures. *—PTI*

'DMK's delimitation meet is to hide incompetencies'

CHENNAI, 23 MARCH

Tamil Nadu's principal opposition party, the AIADMK, has slammed the ruling DMK's meeting on Parliamentary delimitation, calling it a "big drama" to hide the government's in competencies. AIADMK spokesperson Kovai Sathyan criticized the Joint Action Committee (JAC) meeting chaired by Stalin, saying it left an impression of being a "staged drama".

AIADMK has accused DMK of contradicting itself on delimitation. While Stalin's invitation letter states he's not against delimitation, the DMK is simultaneously claiming that the exercise itself is wrong. Sathyan questioned which stance is genuine, highlighting the DMK's alleged desperation to stick to a narrative of delimitation to hide its failures and corruption.

AIADMK proposes maintaining Tamil Nadu's current proportion of MPs at 7.18%, which

Kovai Sathyan *PHOTO: ANI*

was omitted from the DMK's resolution. The party claims DMK is trying to carry forward the delimitation narrative to the 2026 Assembly elections, while concealing its in competencies and corruption.

Stalin has argued that delimitation based on population would reduce Lok Sabha seats for south Indian States. However, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has assured that the delimitation done on a pro-rata basis will not affect these states. The meeting on Saturday urged extending the freeze on parliamentary constituencies by another 25 years. *—PTI*

Rajeev Chandrasekhar likely to become Kerala BJP President

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 23 MARCH

BJP leader and former union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar is likely to become the state President of the saffron party, as he is the sole nominee for the post, party sources said.

A formal announcement will be made following the party's state council meeting on Monday. BJP's central observer Prahlad Joshi is expected to officially declare his appointment on Monday, sources added.

On Sunday, Chandrasekhar filed two sets of nomination papers for the position at BJP headquarters in the state capital.

At 60, Chandrasekhar brings two decades of political experience to the role. He has served as a Union Minister of State for the departments of Electronics and IT, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and Jal Shakti.

Rajeev Chandrasekhar *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

He served as Rajya Sabha MP from Karnataka for three terms and as the BJP's national spokesperson. He is the Vice-Chairman of the NDA's Kerala unit.

A familiar face in Kerala, Chandrasekhar contested the 2024 Lok Sabha elections from Thiruvananthapuram as the NDA candidate but lost to Congress leader Shashi Tharoor by 16,077 votes.

Born to Keralite parents in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, Chandrasekhar has family roots in Thrissur.

Speculation had been rife that he might continue in the role, in view of upcoming local body elections and 2026 Assembly polls.

Gopi stated that Chandrasekhar could serve as a "catalyst" in strengthening the party's organisational efforts. *—PTI*

- BJP's central observer Prahlad Joshi is expected to officially declare his appointment on Monday. On Sunday, Chandrasekhar filed two sets of nomination papers for the position

M'rashtra preps for 2027 Kumbh Mela in Nashik

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

Preparations for the 2027 Simhastha Kumbh Mela in Nashik are progressing at a slower pace than anticipated, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Sunday, describing it as an event of "faith and technology".

He also said that efforts will be made to develop Trimbakeshwar temple, one of the 12 jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva, and announced that a Kumbh Mela Authority Act will be introduced soon.

The chief minister noted that while work on infrastructure is currently behind schedule, the situation is improving.

"We started preparations for the Kumbh Mela last year. If we had started the work in 2020, we would have been in a more comfortable position today," he said. *—PTI*

CASH CONTROVERSY

Inquiry could lead to serious consequences for judge

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

With Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna constituting a three-member panel to probe the discovery of "four to five semi-burnt sacks" of Indian currency notes after a fire incident at the residence of Delhi High Court judge Yashwant Varma, the in-house procedure has entered the crucial second-stage whose findings will decide the fate of the judge.

The fire incident at the storeroom of the official residence of Justice Varma on March 14 in posh Lutyens' Delhi locality purportedly led to the discovery of the cash by firefighters and police personnel.

The CJI constituted the three-member panel after the Delhi High Court Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya in his report dated March 21 and made public on Saturday evening called for a "deeper probe" into the allegations.

The three-member inquiry committee formed by the CJI consists of Justices Sheel Nagu (Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court), G S Sandhawalia (Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court) and Karnataka High Court judge Anu Sivaraman.

Police outside the residence of Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma, in New Delhi, on Sunday. Pieces of burnt currency note was found among debris near Varma's residence *PHOTO: PTI*

However, no timeline has been fixed for the inquiry committee to conclude the probe.

In 2014, while dealing with a case of alleged sexual harassment of a subordinate court judge in Madhya Pradesh at the behest of a sitting judge of the high court, the top court laid down the in-house procedure meant to probe the allegations against a judge of the constitutional courts.

It said in the first stage of the in-house procedure, the prima facie veracity of the allegations contained in the complaint is ascertained.

The top court had said it is the "second stage of the in-house procedure" relating to sitting judges of high courts which could lead to serious consequences. The second stage is monitored by none other than the CJI, it had said.

Only if the Chief Justice of India endorses the view expressed by the Chief Justice of the high court, that a deeper probe is called for, he would constitute a "three-member Committee", and thereby take the investigative process to the second stage.

This committee will comprise two Chief Justices of the High Courts (other than the concerned High Court), besides a Judge of a High Court. The second stage postulates a deeper probe, it had said.

Making an exception in this case, CJI Sanjiv Khanna had asked the Delhi High Court chief justice not to assign any judicial work to Justice Varma for the time being.

The 2014 verdict said that in the eventuality of the judge concerned not abiding by the advice of the CJI to resign, then the CJI would intimate the President of India, and the Prime Minister of India, of the findings of the three-member Committee, warranting initiation of proceedings for his removal.

The video, also shared by Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora with Justice Upadhyaya, clearly shows burnt cash and firefighters dousing the flames.

Justice Varma has, in his response, strongly denounced the allegations and said no cash was ever placed in the storeroom either by him or any of his family members. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Videographer's body found in Ballia, case filed

BALLIA, 23 MARCH

A murder case has been filed against five individuals following the discovery of a videographer's body, missing for five days, from a wheat field in Ballia. The mutilated body of 24-year-old Chandan Bind was located near Khaki Baba's Mathiya under the Revati police station area on Saturday evening. Bind, a resident of Mangarh village, had been working as a video photographer in Rani Ganj market and was last seen on the night of 18 March. Circle Officer Mohammad Fahim stated that, based on a complaint from Bind's father, Shyam Bihari Prasad, a case has been registered against Surendra, Shri Bhagwan, Bali Yadav, Deepak Yadav, all from Mangarh, and Rohit Yadav from Bihar's Saran district. The body has been sent for post-mortem as investigations continue. *—PTI*

Cops probe murder attempt at Kurukshetra Yajna

KURUKSHETRA, 23 MARCH

Police have registered an attempted murder case following a complaint from a 16-year-old boy who sustained a bullet injury during a Mahayajna at Keshav Park. The ritual, organised by Shri Shri 1008 Swami Hari Om of Tripura Shaktipeeth, is being conducted from 18 to 27 March. The incident occurred on Saturday when an altercation broke out among brahmins over the quality of food served at the event. An unidentified security guard allegedly opened fire, injuring Ashish Kumar from Lucknow. The resulting chaos led to brahmins vandalising posters and stone-pelting, injuring another individual named Prince from Uttar Pradesh. Krishna Gate station house officer Jagdish Chand confirmed that the investigation is underway, while Swami Hari Om accused "unscrupulous" elements of trying to disrupt the yajna. *—PTI*

Mumbai CB nabs 2015 murder accused in Gujarat

MUMBAI, 23 MARCH

An accused in a 2015 murder case was held from Mehsana in Gujarat by the Mumbai Crime Branch (CB), an official said on Sunday. Imran Sabir Sheikh was held by the Anti Extortion Cell of Crime Branch from Sidhpur in the neighbouring state, he added. "In April 2015, Nagpada-resident Riyaz Hussain Abdul Quereshi, 44, was murdered allegedly by Waseem Akram Sheikh, Sajid Ali Aashiq Ali Chowdhary and Imran Sheikh. While Wasim and Sajid Ali were apprehended at the time, Imran had fled. He was staying in Gujarat under the new identity of Rahil Sabir Sheikh," the official said. He was held on a tip off, the official added. *—PTI*

Couple found hanging in Delhi's Hauz Khas

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Early on Sunday, the bodies of a 21-year-old pizza shop worker and an 18-year-old woman were discovered hanging from a tree in Deer Park, Hauz Khas, with police investigating the possibility of suicide. Authorities believe the pair were in a romantic relationship and may have taken their lives due to familial opposition; however, some locals have raised concerns about potential foul play.

A call to police at 6.31am led to the discovery of the bodies. The man, identified as a resident of Pilanji village, had left home around 2 pm on Saturday, while the woman, from Chattarpur Enclave, had also departed around the same time. Investigators are currently examining nearby surveillance footage, as there are no CCTV cameras within the park. *—PTI*

Assam state board cancels exams amid paper leak

Schools suspended amid multiple paper leaks; probe underway

GUWAHATI, 23 MARCH

The Assam state board has cancelled all Class 11 examinations scheduled from March 24 to 29, involving 36 subjects, following reports of significant question paper leaks. Education Minister Ranoj Pegu announced the decision after the Mathematics paper leak surfaced, prompting authorities to lodge a police complaint.

The Higher Secondary first-year examinations commenced on 6 March and were set to conclude on 29 March. The Mathematics paper, initially scheduled for 21 March, was compromised after 18 schools, including three government institutions, reportedly broke the security seal a day prior to the exam.

Pegu stated, "Due to reports of question paper leaks and a breach of protocol, the remaining subjects... stand cancelled." He shared an official order from the Assam State School Education Board (ASSEB), indicating the need for a board meeting on Monday to discuss a revised examination schedule.

The Higher Secondary first-year examinations commenced on 6 March and were set to conclude on 29 March **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

The ASSEB has suspended the affiliations of 15 private schools across ten districts for violating examination protocol. Pegu confirmed that actions would also be taken against three additional schools. These institutions will be barred from admitting Class 11 students for the 2025-26 academic year.

An examination of the situation has led ASSEB Controller of Examinations Ranjan Kumar Das to conclude that the possibility of further leaks cannot be excluded, given the nature of the circumstances. Das also noted that an FIR has been lodged at CID Headquarters in Guwahati, with additional cases planned against the involved educational institutions.

Last week, the Class 9 English annual exam in Assam's Barpeta district was cancelled due to a question paper leak that emerged on social media. *—PTI*

Curfew lifted in Nagpur after six days of violence

NAGPUR, 23 MARCH

The curfew imposed in Nagpur, Maharashtra, following violent incidents on 17 March has been lifted in the four affected areas as of Sunday, six days after unrest erupted. The disturbances led to the curbs in multiple police station jurisdictions, including Kotwali, Ganeshpeth, Tehsil and Lakadganj.

The violence began on 17 March amid rumours that a 'chadar' inscribed with holy texts had been burned during protests by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, demanding the removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb in the Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district.

Nagpur Police Commissioner Ravinder Singal announced the curfew's end in Kotwali, Tehsil, Ganeshpeth, and Yashodhara Nagar from 3 PM on Sunday. Despite the lifting of restrictions, police patrolling will continue in sensitive areas, and local police will remain deployed to prevent further disturbances.

The riots involved significant property damage, with reports of large-scale stone-pelting and arson, resulting in injuries to 33 police personnel, including three deputy commissioners. Over 100 individuals have been arrested in connection with the violence.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis asserted that the government would seek to recover the costs of the damages from those involved in the rioting and warned that properties of the perpetrators would be confiscated and sold if they failed to compensate for the losses.

He emphasised the government's commitment to taking stringent action against those who assaulted police officers during the unrest. *—PTI*

The couple was remanded to judicial custody for 14 days by a local court last Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Murder-accused couple in drug-withdrawal pain

MEERUT, 23 MARCH

Muskan Rastogi and her lover Sahil Shukla, currently in judicial custody for the alleged murder of Saurabh Rajput, are reportedly struggling to adjust to life in Chaudhary Charan Singh district jail. Prison officials have claimed that both individuals are exhibiting symptoms of drug withdrawal.

The couple was remanded to judicial custody for 14 days by a local court last Wednesday. Sources within the jail have reported signs of extreme distress in both Muskan and Sahil, with claims that they are unable to sleep properly and are refusing to eat or drink.

Senior Jail Superintendent Viresh Raj Sharma explained that the duo has a long history of drug use, resulting in restlessness and insomnia. To manage their withdrawal symptoms, medical staff have prescribed medication, and a dedicated team is closely monitoring their condition. Investigations have indicated that they regularly consumed drugs and alcohol prior to their arrest.

Since their incarceration, neither Muskan nor Sahil has received any visitors, according to a source close to the situation.

The shocking murder of Saurabh Rajput is alleged to have occurred on 4 March, when he was reportedly drugged and subsequently stabbed by Muskan and Sahil. After dismembering his body, they sealed it inside a drum with cement before vacating to Himachal Pradesh. Throughout this period, they misled Rajput's family by sending messages from his phone.

Muskan and Saurabh Rajput married in 2016 against family opposition and had a six-year-old daughter. Muskan and Sahil, childhood acquaintances, reportedly rekindled their friendship via a WhatsApp group in 2019, which led to the tragic events currently under investigation. *—PTI*

Earth sinking: Howrah faces power, water woes

HOWRAH, 23 MARCH

Authorities have reported ongoing restoration efforts in Howrah city, West Bengal, following significant land subsidence that occurred on 21 March, damaging critical infrastructure and leaving residents without water and electricity. The subsidence primarily affected the Belgachia area, breaking a 1-km-long water pipeline and leading to acute water shortages in several wards of Howrah Municipal Corporation.

Local residents reported that dozens of houses have been damaged or partially destroyed due to the subsidence. In response to the crisis, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) and nearby civic bodies have deployed water tankers and are distributing water pouches. However, residents have complained about long queues and inadequate supplies.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

An official from KMC assured that efforts are underway to restore the pipeline, with water services expected to resume by Monday at the latest. The power supply has also been disrupted, with several electricity poles either having collapsed or being at risk of falling due to the subsidence.

As a precautionary measure, authorities have relocated 350 residents from 18 severely damaged houses to a local school for temporary shelter. Public announcements encouraging other residents to evacuate have met with limited success, as many remain uncertain about where to go.

Experts have identified the accumulation of methane gas from decomposing waste at the Belgachia dump as the primary cause of the subsidence. They are recommending controlled venting of the gas to avert further soil weakening.

State minister and Central Howrah MLA Arup Roy visited the site to assess the situation, acknowledging its severity. He stated that the government is actively working on solutions, including relocating affected families and consulting experts to address the issue. Efforts to restore essential services are being prioritised. *—PTI*

CBI's closure report on Sushant death case sparks controversy

THANE, 23 MARCH

Following the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) submission of a closure report regarding Sushant Singh Rajput's death, Advocate Nilesh C. Ojha, representing Disha Salian's father, asserted that the report lacks legal weight and that the court can still initiate further inquiries. Ojha emphasised, "No clean chit has been given... the court can issue an arrest warrant or call for further investigation," referencing the Aarushi Talwar case as a precedent.

Disha Salian was found dead on 8 June, 2020, just days before Rajput's demise on 14 June, a tragedy that led to widespread controversy and public outcry. Rajput's post-mortem report indicated that asphyxia was the cause of death.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

In a related statement, former Bihar DGP Gupteshwar Pandey expressed concerns over the Mumbai Police's handling of the case, describing their conduct as suspicious. He claimed that the Mumbai Police had not cooperated adequately with the Bihar Police during their initial investigation, asserting, "Had Mumbai Police handled the case well, it would not have faced defamation."

With the CBI's closure report now filed in a Mumbai Court nearly five years after Rajput's death, questions surrounding the investigation's comprehensiveness and the potential loss of evidence persist. The Bombay High Court is scheduled to hear Disha Salian's case on 2 April. The ongoing interest in the case highlights the enduring quest for clarity and justice surrounding the events preceding Rajput's tragic passing. *—PTI*

'World's highest marathon' to kick off in Himachal

LAHAUL, 23 MARCH

The fourth edition of the Lahaul Snow Marathon commenced on Sunday, attracting over 250 participants and aiming to raise awareness about ecological damage in the Sissu Valley. Touted as the "world's highest marathon," the event features four categories: 42 km, 21 km, 10 km, and 5 km.

Organiser Rajiv Kumar highlighted the marathon's role in promoting ecological conservation and generating employment opportunities while boosting tourism in the region. "International participants help raise awareness about Lahaul Valley's unique environment," he said. *—PTI*

CALL FOR JUSTICE

Ex-Army personnel protest demanding justice for Colonel Pushpinder Singh Bath, who was allegedly thrashed by 12 police officials over a parking dispute, in Patiala, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Sambhal mosque committee chief arrested

SAMBHAL, 23 MARCH

Shahi Jama Masjid committee president Zafar Ali was arrested on Sunday in connection with the violence that erupted here in November over a court-ordered survey of the mosque, a police officer said.

Earlier in the day, officials said the mosque committee chief was taken into custody by the local police's special investigation team to record his statement in connection with the 24 November violence case.

Ali's brother alleged that it was done to prevent him from submitting his testimony before a three-member judicial commission on Monday.

Shahi Jama Masjid committee president Zafar Ali was arrested in connection with the violence over a court-ordered survey of the mosque **PHOTO: ANI**

The panel has been appointed by the UP government to investigate the violence in which four people were killed and several injured. The Mughal-era mosque has been at the centre of a major row after a petition claimed that it was the site of an ancient Hindu temple.

Sambhal Kotwali in-charge Anuj Kumar Tomar confirmed that the mosque committee President had been taken into custody by the SIT to record his statement.

He further said, "Zafar has already given his statement in a press conference and he will not retract it. He had clearly said that the police fired shots, and those who died were killed by police bullets." *—PTI*

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Naxal-hit village sees light after 77 years

RAIPUR, 23 MARCH

A Chhattisgarh village, long affected by Left-Wing Extremism, has finally received electricity after more than seven decades. Timenar, located in the Maoist-affected Bijapur district, has been living in darkness, lacking basic facilities, until now.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai announced that the electrification of Timenar marked the beginning of a new era for governance and development in the region of Bastar. "All 53 households in the village, part of Bechapal village panchayat in the Bhairamgarh development block, have been electrified for the first time since Independence," a governmental statement confirmed, accomplished under the Chief Minister's Manjra-Tola Electrification Scheme.

Residents said the arrival of electricity has eliminated the atmosphere of fear and insecurity and is a significant step towards improving their quality of life. **PHOTO: ANI**

The electrification is seen as symbolic of the end of Maoist terror and the dawn of development, peace, and prosperity for local residents. Villagers expressed their joy and disbelief, stating they had never anticipated seeing the glow of electricity. They shared how the arrival of electricity has instilled hope, alleviating fear from the darkness of the night and threats posed by wildlife. Parents highlighted the newfound opportunity for their children to study more easily.

Alongside electrification, infrastructure initiatives, including improved roads, healthcare, and educational facilities, are underway in Timenar. Chief Minister Sai reaffirmed his government's commitment to electrifying all "manjra-tola" (hamlets) and expediting progress in Maoist-affected areas, asserting, "Where there was once the shadow of Maoist terror, the rays of development are shining." *—PTI*

IED alert as Naxal threat spikes with new camps

NEW DELHI/RAIPUR, 23 MARCH

An alert has been sounded in the anti-Naxal operations theatre of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand following a "spike" in improvised explosive device (IED) blasts and recoveries, including that of a device rigged with beer bottles and a small antenna for remote control explosion, officials said.

The uptick in IED recovery and blasts has been noticed as multiple security forces move into core Naxal areas to meet Union government's deadline of wiping off Left Wing Extremism (LWE) from the country by March 2026, the officials said.

"To meet this target, the security forces are establishing new forward camps, especially in the remotest districts of Chhattisgarh's Bastar area. The Maoists are no more engaging in one-to-one encounters as they are low on arms and ammunition and hence IEDs are being used in more numbers to kill or maim troops," a senior officer in the security establishment said.

A recent analysis of IED incidents shows "drastic" spike in numbers and hence the forces have been issued a "high alert" to guard against these attacks and their new technology in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand as the TCOC period is nearing, the officer said.

The Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign is undertaken by the Maoists in summer months to launch attacks against security forces as forests go dry and trees shed leaves allowing a long range of view to pick up movement of security forces. *—PTI*

WILDFIRES RAVAGE S KOREA

South Korea has declared a state of disaster following multiple forest fires in the country's south, which have killed at least four people and displaced hundreds. The fires, which began in southern South Korea, prompted the evacuation of over 880 residents, including 260 from Sancheong and 620 from Ulsan and Gyeongsang province. As of Saturday night, the Sancheong fire, which has burned 847 hectares of land, was 25 per cent contained ***PHOTO: PTI***

HIMALAYAN GLACIERS ARE MELTING RAPIDLY

Glaciers around the world are thinning at an alarming rate, and those in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region are facing the most dramatic losses. A new United Nations report released on the World Day for Glaciers reveals that these glaciers are retreating 65 per cent faster between 2011 and 2020 compared to the previous decade, a stark indicator of the impacts of climate change.

The Asia-Pacific region, home to some of the world's highest mountains and largest glacier systems, is especially vulnerable to these changes. Spanning five million square kilometres, the region contains approximately 1,00,000sqkm of glaciers, earning it the nickname "Third Pole" or the "Water Tower of Asia." It is the largest store of ice and snow on Earth outside the Arctic and Antarctic, and over ten major river systems originating here support nearly two billion people.

According to the report, if global temperatures rise by 1.5°C to 2°C, the glacier volume in the HKH region could decline by 30 to 50 per cent by 2100. A rise above 2°C could result in the loss of 45 per cent of the region's 2020 glacier volume. The HKH mountains span eight countries — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan — feeding ten major river basins. In total, 240 million people live in the region, with an additional 1.65 billion downstream depending on these rivers for water, sanitation, agriculture, hydropower, and ecosystem services.

The HKH mountains span eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan ***PHOTO: PTI***

A global crisis

The situation is dire globally as well. Mountains across the world are experiencing unprecedented changes, with glaciers melting at a rapid pace. Around 1.1 billion people live in mountainous regions, with two-thirds of them residing in urban areas. The UN World Water Development Report 2025, released on 21 March, states that if global temperatures rise between 1.5°C and 4°C, mountain glaciers worldwide are projected to lose 26 to 41 per cent of their total mass by 2100, compared to 2015 levels.

Michela Miletto, UNESCO WWAP Coordinator, and Richard Connor, Editor-in-Chief, wrote in the report, "Mountains worldwide, including those in the tropics and small islands, are undergoing unprecedented changes. And we all ultimately live downstream." The rapid disappearance of glaciers is contributing to changing hydrological systems, with warming and melting affecting freshwater availability and creating new hazards for people and ecosystems.

The hazards of glacier melts

The impact of glacier loss extends beyond water shortages. As glaciers melt, they increase the risk of natural disasters like Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) — sudden, catastrophic floods caused by the rupture of glacier-fed lakes. These floods, along with flash floods and landslides, threaten human settlements, agriculture, infrastructure, and energy systems. The number and area of glacial lakes have expanded substantially since the 1990s, and GLOFs have caused over 12,000 deaths in the past 200 years.

In the HKH region alone, GLOFs have claimed more than 7,000 lives in the last 190 years, with the risk expected to triple by the end of this century. "Many consequences will go beyond the limits of adaptation," the report warned, underscoring the growing danger to communities dependent on these waters.

Other climate change impacts

The report also highlighted the paradoxical relationship between mountain-based industries and climate change. For instance, lithium mining in Bolivia, northern Argentina, and Chile demands significant water extraction, putting pressure on local communities. Producing one tonne of lithium requires around 2,000 cubic metres of water, exacerbating water stress in already vulnerable areas. Hydropower, a dominant industry in mountainous regions, is also being affected by climate change. Unregulated small hydropower plants are straining local water resources, as seen in Georgia, where excessive hydropower infrastructure has led some rivers to dry up. Moreover, climate change is directly impacting hydropower generation, with melting glaciers, shifting precipitation patterns, and increased evaporation reducing water availability. There is growing concern that temporary boosts in water from glacial melt could be offset by greater evaporation and declining water storage in reservoirs.

Governance and funding gaps

Water governance in mountain regions is significantly weaker compared to lowland areas, which is particularly evident in the HKH. Effective transboundary cooperation remains elusive, with mistrust between countries hindering data sharing and disaster preparedness. The report emphasized the need for enhanced cooperation, better governance, and more efficient resource management to address these challenges.

The UN report also laid out six critical actions for the HKH region to tackle the crisis. These include prioritizing sustainable development, concerted climate action, ecosystem resilience, and regional cooperation for data sharing. Additionally, the report called for incentivizing local communities to protect watershed areas and increased funding for mountain communities facing climate-related challenges.

A call for urgent action

As glaciers continue to melt and climate impacts intensify, it is clear that the HKH region, and mountain regions worldwide, are facing an unprecedented crisis.

The report calls for urgent action at all levels to mitigate the effects of climate change, protect vulnerable communities, and safeguard the vital freshwater resources that so many depend on. Without immediate and concerted action, the consequences will be devastating, not only for mountain regions but for billions of people downstream.

—Down To Earth

SALAR

AI hallucinates making things up that never happened

When someone sees something that isn't there, people often refer to the experience as a hallucination. Hallucinations occur when your sensory perception does not correspond to external stimuli.

Technologies that rely on artificial intelligence can have hallucinations, too.

When an algorithmic system generates information that seems plausible but is actually inaccurate or misleading, computer scientists call it an AI hallucination.

Researchers have found these behaviours in different types of AI systems, from chatbots such as ChatGPT to image generators such as Dall-E to autonomous vehicles. We are information science researchers who have studied hallucinations in AI speech recognition systems.

Wherever AI systems are used in daily life, their hallucinations can pose risks. Some may be minor – when a chatbot gives the wrong answer to a simple question, the user may end up ill-informed. But in other cases, the stakes are much higher.

From courtrooms where AI software is used to make sentencing decisions to health insurance companies that use algorithms to determine a patient's eligibility for coverage, AI hallucinations can have life-altering consequences.

They can even be life-threatening: Autonomous vehicles use AI to detect obstacles, other vehicles and pedestrians.

Making it up

Hallucinations and their effects depend on the type of AI system. With large language models – the underlying technology of AI chatbots – hallucinations are pieces of information that sound convincing but are incorrect, made up or irrelevant.

An AI chatbot might create a reference to a scientific article that doesn't exist or provide a historical fact that is simply wrong, yet make it sound believable.

In a 2023 court case, for example, a New York attorney submitted a legal brief that he had written with the help of ChatGPT. A discerning judge later noticed that the brief cited a case that ChatGPT had made up. This could lead to different outcomes in courtrooms if humans were not able to detect the hallucinated piece of information.

With AI tools that can recognize objects in images, hallucinations occur when the AI generates captions that are not faithful to the provided image. Imagine asking a system to list objects in an image that only includes a woman from the chest up talking on a phone and receiving a response that says a woman talking on a phone while sitting on a bench. This inaccurate information could lead to different consequences in contexts where accuracy is critical.

What causes hallucinations?

Engineers build AI systems by gathering massive amounts of data and feeding it into a computational system that detects patterns in the data. The system develops methods for responding to questions or performing tasks based on those patterns.

Supply an AI system with 1,000 photos of different breeds of dogs, labelled accordingly, and the system will soon learn to detect the difference between a poodle and a golden retriever. But feed it a photo of a blueberry muffin and, as machine learning researchers have shown, it may tell you that the muffin is a chihuahua.

When a system doesn't understand the question or the information that it is presented with, it may hallucinate.

Hallucinations often occur when the model fills in gaps based on similar contexts from its training data, or when it is built using biased or incomplete training data. This leads to incorrect guesses, as in the case of the mislabeled blueberry muffin.

It's important to distinguish between AI hallucinations and intentionally creative AI outputs. When an AI system is asked to be creative – like when writing a story or generating artistic images – its novel outputs are expected and desired.

Hallucinations, on the other hand, occur when an AI system is asked to provide factual information or perform specific tasks but instead generates incorrect or misleading content while presenting it as accurate.

The key difference lies in the context and purpose: Creativity is appropriate for artistic tasks, while hallucinations are problematic when accuracy and reliability are required.

To address these issues, companies have suggested using high-quality training data and limiting AI responses to follow certain guidelines. Nevertheless, these issues may persist in popular AI tools.

What's at risk?

The impact of an output such as calling a blueberry muffin a chihuahua may seem trivial, but consider the different kinds of technologies that use image recognition systems: An autonomous vehicle that fails to identify objects could lead to a fatal traffic accident.

An autonomous military drone that misidentifies a target could put civilians' lives in danger.

For AI tools that provide automatic speech recognition, hallucinations are AI transcriptions that include words or phrases that were never actually spoken.

This is more likely to occur in noisy environments, where an AI system may end up adding new or irrelevant words in an attempt to decipher background noise such as a passing truck or a crying infant. *—PTI*

Engineers build AI systems by gathering massive amounts of data and feeding it into a computational system that detects patterns in the data ***PHOTO: LINKEDIN***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

The Gaza ceasefire is dead – Israeli domestic politics killed it

The Gaza ceasefire appears to be dead, and while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sought to blame Hamas for the renewed violence, the true cause lies in Israeli domestic politics. On 18 March, 2025, fighting resumed, claiming over 400 Palestinian lives, a grim development that Netanyahu himself warned was "only the beginning." However, the seeds of this violence have been sown within Israel's political landscape.

From the onset of the ceasefire in January, Israeli politics experts, including myself, flagged an insurmountable problem: the execution of the plan's second phase, which would involve a full withdrawal of Israeli military forces from Gaza in exchange for the release of remaining hostages. This plan was always a nonstarter for far-right factions within Netanyahu's coalition that he relies on to stay in power. Withdrawing from Gaza contradicts the maximalist ideologies of key figures within Netanyahu's government, including some members of his own Likud party. Their position is clear: Israel should maintain control of Gaza and push as many Palestinians as possible out.

This viewpoint aligns with the Far-Right's vision for post-conflict Gaza, which seeks permanent Israeli control. Many members of Netanyahu's government cheered when former US President Donald Trump suggested Palestinians should be cleared from Gaza to make way for a massive reconstruction project led by the US. As a historian of Israel and professor of peace studies, I believe this vision is fundamentally incompatible with the ceasefire plan, but it increasingly appears to resonate with some factions of the US administration, which could have served as a critical pressure point for Netanyahu.

While Hamas certainly bears responsibility for delays and manipulations in the ceasefire process, turning hostage releases into propaganda spectacles, the resumption of violence is largely tied to domestic Israeli politics that predate the 7 October, 2023, Hamas attack. Netanyahu's broader political agenda — particularly his push to weaken Israel's judiciary — also plays a crucial role in the resumption of conflict.

Since returning to power in January 2023, Netanyahu's Hard-Right government has undertaken substantial efforts to transform the political system, concentrating power in the executive and legislative branches while diminishing the independence of the judiciary. Independent institutions, like the attorney general's office and the police, have been weakened or brought under government control, a move that many critics have denounced as a "legal coup."

Smoke rises from a building after it was targeted by an Israeli Army strike in Gaza ***PHOTO: PTI***

In 2023, a massive protest movement pushed back against Netanyahu's judicial overhaul, but it was the 7 October Hamas attack that triggered a drastic shift. Many hoped the attack would lead Netanyahu to reconsider his political plans and unify the country. However, Netanyahu's response indicated otherwise.

The ceasefire deal in November 2023 failed to make significant headway, and many began to suspect Netanyahu's primary interest was prolonging the war. A critical factor behind this is his ongoing legal troubles. Indicted on charges of breach of trust, fraud, and corruption, Netanyahu faced the possibility of standing trial in 2024. War, however, offered the prime minister an opportunity to delay his testimony and deflect attention from his legal challenges. By presenting himself as the leader of a nation at war, Netanyahu could avoid accountability in the courtroom.

Moreover, the war provided cover for Netanyahu to remove his political opponents. He systematically purged critics within Israel's security and political leadership, accusing them of either being responsible for the 7 October attack or mishandling the conflict. This purge extended to high-profile figures like Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara and Ronen Bar, the head of the powerful Shin Bet security agency, who had been investigating Netanyahu's inner circle.

The collapse of the ceasefire coincides with growing political pressure on Netanyahu from the right-wing factions of his coalition. Under Israeli law, the government must approve its annual budget by March's end or face elections. However, Netanyahu faces resistance from ultra-Orthodox parties over army draft exemptions. These parties demand formal legislation that would allow ultra-Orthodox men to continue avoiding military service. The public, meanwhile, has been calling for an end to this exemption, intensifying pressure on Netanyahu.

To secure support for the budget and prevent elections, Netanyahu turned to the far-right Otzma Yehudit party, which had initially left his coalition over the ceasefire. This backslide into the far-right fold gives Netanyahu crucial votes for the budget. However, it signals that the government will not pursue the second phase of the ceasefire, thus effectively ending the agreement.

While Israeli domestic politics alone cannot be blamed for the renewed fighting, the role of the US administration cannot be overlooked. The transition from Joe Biden to Donald Trump in January 2025 marked a significant shift in US policy. Trump's statements suggest support for increased military pressure on Hamas, tacitly endorsing Netanyahu's position. By blaming Hamas for the resumption of war, Trump gives the Israeli government cover, even as it abandons the ceasefire plan.

Hamas, on the other hand, stands to benefit from the ceasefire. It would allow the group to retain control of Gaza and claim victory for securing the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. Thus, Hamas has the most to lose from the collapse of the ceasefire.

In Israel, a majority of the public is in favour of ending the war, completing the ceasefire, and demanding Netanyahu's resignation. Protests have been gaining momentum, with widespread demonstrations against the government's decision to resume fighting and the attempt to oust Ronen Bar. The stark contrast between public sentiment and Netanyahu's political manoeuvres suggests that Israel is facing an unprecedented crisis. The prime minister, in his pursuit of power, has emerged as the most significant threat to the nation's stability.

—The Conversation

PHOTO: X

Carney eyes Ottawa route to Canadian Parliament

TORONTO, 23 MARCH

New Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney will run in an Ottawa area district as he seeks to join Parliament for the first time, officials said on Saturday, a day before Carney triggers an early general election before a vote on 28 April.

The election will take place against the backdrop of a trade war and sovereignty threats from US President Donald Trump.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly, said Carney will run to represent the suburban Ottawa area of Nepean. The election campaign for 343 seats (districts) in the House of Commons will last for 37 days. The party that commands a majority in the House of Commons – either alone or with the support of another party – will form the next government and its leader will be the Prime Minister.

Carney replaced Justin Trudeau, who announced his resignation in January.—*PTI*

Wildfires prompt emergency in Carolinas

RALEIGH, 23 MARCH

Wildfires forced a mandatory evacuation in one North Carolina county as emergency crews fought separate fires in an area of the state still recovering from Hurricane Helene, while South Carolina's governor declared an emergency in response to a growing wildfire. North Carolina Department of Public Safety announced a mandatory evacuation starting at 8.20pm Saturday for parts of Polk County in western North Carolina about 128.7kms west of Charlotte. Public safety department said a shelter had been established in Columbus, North Carolina. North Carolina Forest Service's online wildfire public viewer indicated three active fires in Polk County, with the two largest spanning between 1,100 and 1,240 acres. —*PTI*

4 cops, four labourers killed in Balochistan

KARACHI, 23 MARCH

Unidentified armed men have killed four policemen and four labourers in two separate incidents in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province. In the first incident, four policemen were killed when armed men on a motorcycle opened fire on a patrolling police mobile in the Gharibabad area of Noshki city on Saturday. In the second incident, four labourers from Punjab province were killed in the Malangzai area of Kalat's Mangochar city. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attacks. The terror attacks come during a tense situation in the province because of protests called by the Baloch Yakjehti Committees. Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti condemned the attacks as a "brutal act of terrorism". —*PTI*

Israel strikes Gaza as death toll climbs past 50,000

Houthis launch another missile at Israel setting off air raids

DEIR AL-BALAH, MARCH 23

Israeli strikes across the southern Gaza Strip killed at least 26 Palestinians overnight into Sunday, including a Hamas political leader and several women and children. Residents said tanks had advanced into an area of the southern city of Rafah as the military ordered it evacuated.

Gaza's Health Ministry said the total number of Palestinians killed in Gaza since the start of the Israel-Hamas war has now passed 50,000 after Israel ended the ceasefire last week with a wave of strikes that killed hundreds.

The European Hospital said the dead included five children and their parents killed in a strike in Khan Younis. Another family two girls and their parents were killed in a separate strike on the southern city. The Kuwaiti Hospital said it received the bodies of a woman and child killed in another strike.

People take part in a protest demanding the release of hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, in Tel Aviv, Israel *PHOTO: PTI*

Hamas separately said that Salah Bardawil, a member of its political bureau and of the Palestinian parliament, was killed in a strike near Khan Younis that also killed his wife. Bardawil was a well-known member of the group's political wing who gave media interviews over the years.

The Hamas official and his wife were not included in the tolls reported by the hospitals.

Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen who are allied with Hamas meanwhile launched another missile at Israel, setting off air raid sirens. The Israeli military said the projectile was intercepted, and there were no reports of casualties or damage.

Two hospitals in southern Gaza said they had received 17 bodies from strikes overnight, including several women and children.

Israel ended its ceasefire with Hamas last week when it launched a surprise wave of airstrikes that killed hundreds of Palestinians across the territory. The Houthis resumed their attacks on Israel, portraying them as an act of solidarity with the Palestinians, despite recent U.S. strikes targeting the Yemeni rebels.

The ceasefire that took hold in January paused 15 months of heavy fighting ignited by Hamas' 7 October, 2023 attack into Israel. —*PTI*

Police block protesters as they march during a protest against the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu in Istanbul *PHOTO: PTI*

Turkish court jails Istanbul mayor

ISTANBUL, 23 MARCH

A court formally arrested the Mayor of Istanbul and key rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday and ordered him jailed pending the outcome of a trial on corruption charges.

Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu was detained following a raid on his residence earlier this week, sparking the largest wave of street demonstrations in Turkiye in more than a decade. It also deepened concerns over democracy and rule of law in Turkey.

His imprisonment is widely regarded as a political move to remove a major contender from the next Presidential race, currently scheduled for 2028

Government officials reject accusations that legal actions against Opposition figures are politically motivated and insist that Turkey's courts operate independently. The formal arrest came as his Opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, began holding a primary Presidential election to endorse Imamoglu as its Presidential candidate despite the arrest. —*PTI*

Russian strikes on Kyiv kill 7 ahead of truce talks

Firefighters put out the fire after a drone hit an apartment in a multi-storey building during Russia's drone attack in Kyiv, Ukraine on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

KYIV, 23 MARCH

At least seven people were killed, including a five-year-old child, after Russia launched a barrage of drones targeting Kyiv overnight on Sunday, according to local Ukrainian officials and emergency services.

The attack on the Ukrainian capital came ahead of ceasefire negotiations in Saudi Arabia in which Ukraine and Russia are expected to hold indirect US-mediated talks on Monday to discuss a pause in long-range attacks targeting energy facilities and civilian infrastructure.

The Ukrainian delegation is expected to meet with US officials in Saudi Arabia a day ahead of the indirect talks, Ukrainian President Voldoymyr Zelenskyy said. Ukraine is planning to send technical teams to discuss the details of the partial ceasefire.

Explosions were heard as the air raid blared for over five hours. Russian drones and debris from shot-down drones, which were flying at lower altitudes to evade air defenses, fell on residential buildings. Ukraine's Kyiv City Military Administration said three people were killed and 10 others were injured.

Two residential buildings in Dnipro caught fire due to falling drone debris, according to Kyiv City Military Administration head Tymur Tkachenko. —*PTI*

JANUARY 2008 ATTACK

US lifts rewards on 3 Afghan Taliban men

KABUL, 23 MARCH

The US has lifted bounties on three senior Taliban figures, including the interior minister who also heads a powerful network blamed for bloody attacks against Afghanistan's former Western-backed government, officials in Kabul said Sunday.

Sirajuddin Haqqani, who acknowledged planning a January 2008 attack on the Serena Hotel in Kabul, which killed six people, including US citizen Thor David Hesla, no longer appears on the State Department's Rewards for Justice website. The FBI website on Sunday still featured a wanted poster for him.

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani said the US government had revoked the bounties placed on Haqqani, Abdul Aziz Haqqani and Yahya Haqqani. "These three individuals are two brothers and one paternal cousin," Qani said.

The Haqqani network grew into one of the deadliest arms of the Taliban after the US-led 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

Sirajuddin Haqqani. *PHOTO: PTI*

The group used roadside bombs, suicide bombings and other attacks, including on the Indian and US embassies, the Afghan presidency and other major targets. They also have been linked to extortion, kidnapping and other criminal activity.

Foreign Ministry official Zakir Jalaly said that the Taliban's release of US prisoner George Glezmann on Friday and the removal of bounties showed both sides were "moving beyond the effects of the wartime phase and taking constructive steps to pave the way for progress" in bilateral relations. —*PTI*

Attorney who quit after Trump's win found dead

ALEXANDRIA, 23 MARCH

Former US Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, Jessica Aber, who resigned after US President Donald Trump took office in January, was found dead at her home in Alexandria on Saturday, authorities said on Sunday.

Police said that they have launched an investigation into the surrounding the circumstances of the death of the 43-year-old lawyer.

"This morning, at approximately 9.18 am, Alexandria Police responded to the 900 block of Beverley Drive for the report of an unresponsive woman. Officers located a deceased woman," the police said in a statement.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia will determine the cause and manner of death, it said. Erik S Siebert, the US Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, said the news left him "heartbroken beyond words". —*Agencies*

Chinese Premier meets pro-Trump US senator

BEIJING, 23 MARCH

Chinese Premier Li Qiang met US Senator Steve Daines in Beijing on Sunday, stressing the importance of dialogue over confrontation between China and the US. As tensions rise over trade tariffs and the illegal fentanyl trade, Li emphasised that cooperation, not competition, would benefit both nations. He referred to a January call between Chinese President Xi Jinping and President Donald Trump, where Xi had suggested the two countries could become partners for mutual success.

Daines, a strong supporter of Trump, is the first member of Congress to visit Beijing since Trump's presidency. He was joined by executives from major US businesses, including FedEx, Boeing, Qualcomm, and Pfizer. Daines discussed the ongoing issue of fentanyl precursors with Vice Premier He Lifeng and Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu, reiterating Trump's demand for China to curb the flow of fentanyl-related chemicals. Relations between the US and China have soured recently, with both countries imposing tariffs. In response to these challenges, Premier Li stated that China may introduce new policies to ensure stability. —*PTI*

Pak confirms second case of mpox in 2025

ISLAMABAD, 23 MARCH

- Officials said the country's first case this year was reported in January when a passenger arriving from a Gulf country in Peshawar.

Pakistan confirmed its second case of mpox this year when a 29-year-old man tested positive for the contagious viral infection in Karachi, reported the Dawn.

The patient in Malir district is under treatment at the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC), the report said.

The patient arrived at the hospital two days back with skin lesions, JPMC deputy director Dr Yahya Tunio said, adding that the patient is "stable" and being looked after in the isolation ward.

Tunio said the patient's wife, who rec¬ently travelled to Saudi Arabia, had similar lesions. "He told us that her lesions later healed," the official said, adding that the patient is also Hepatitis C positive.

Sources said officials have started contact tracing following confirmation of the case and intensified screening at airports and border entry points. Authorities have urged the public to remain vigilant.

This is the first case of mpox in Sindh.

Officials said the country's first case this year was reported in January when a passenger arriving from a Gulf country in Peshawar tested positive for the infection.

Last year, eight mpox cases were reported among travellers returning to the countr. There was no case of local transmission of the virus so far. —*PTI*

Pakistan, IMF agree on tariff cuts

Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have again tweaked the economic liberalisation plan and agreed to cut weighted-average-applied tariffs to around 6 per cent – a reduction of 43 per cent over five years in protection level to local industries, a report said. The IMF had long been raising concerns over the protection available to local industries, but authorities were reluctant to open these areas. The country has the third-highest trade-weighted average tariffs in South Asia at 10.6 per cent. After implementing the liberalisation plan, it will have the lowest average tariffs. —*PTI*

Pak, Afg talk issues in bilateral ties

Officials from Pakistan and Afghanistan have held talks in Kabul to improve ties strained by differences over the handling of militancy, transit trade, refugees and other bilateral issues, it emerged on Sunday. Sources said Pakistan's special envoy for Afghanistan, Ambassador Muhammad Sadiq, is visiting Afghanistan from 21 to 23 March at the direction of Deputy Prime Minister-cum-Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar "to discuss Pakistan–Afghanistan bilateral relations". Sadiq held talks with Acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. —*PTI*

IT'S ALL GOOD WITH POPE

Pope Francis appeared on a hospital balcony to bless the crowd after five weeks of treatment for pneumonia, on Sunday. The 88-year-old Pope returned to the Vatican from Rome's Gemelli hospital for rest. His 38-day hospitalisation was the longest of his papacy, sparking widespread concern *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

AMID CUSTODY BATTLE

Indian woman slits son's throat after Disneyland trip

NEW YORK, 23 MARCH

An Indian-origin woman has been charged with allegedly murdering her 11-year-old son after a three-day vacation to Disneyland.

Saritha Ramaraju, 48, has been charged with one felony count of murder. She has also been charged with one felony enhancement of personal use of a weapon, a knife.

She faces a maximum sentence of 26 years to life if convicted on all charges.

Ramaraju, who moved out of California after divorcing the boy's father in 2018, was staying with her son at a motel in Santa Ana for a custody visit. During the visit, she bought three-day passes to Disneyland for herself and her son.

On 19 March, the day Ramaraju was scheduled to check out of the motel and return the boy to his father, she called 911 at 9.12 am to report that she had killed her son and taken pills to kill herself.

Santa Ana police arrived at the motel and found the young boy dead on the bed in a room among Disneyland souvenirs. It appeared the boy had been dead for several hours before his mother called 911. The boy was scheduled to be returned to his father that day.

A large kitchen knife was found inside the motel room which was purchased the day before. Ramaraju was released from the hospital on Thursday after ingesting the unknown substance and arrested on suspicion of stabbing the boy to death.

"The life of a child should not hang in the balance between two parents whose anger for each other outweighs their love for their child," Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer said.

"Anger makes you forget who you love and what you are responsible for doing. The safest place for a child should be in their parents' arms. Instead of wrapping her arms around their son in love, she slit his throat and in the cruelest twist of fate removed him from the very world she brought him into."

While the statement did not name the boy, who was pronounced dead at the scene, a report in NBC Los Angeles identified him as Yatin Ramaraju.

The report added that Saritha Ramaraju had been in a custody battle with her husband Prakash Raju since last year, when she had accused him of making medical and school decisions without her input and alleged he had substance abuse issues.

Prakash had said in court papers that he was born and raised in Bengaluru, India, the NBC report said, adding that the couple had divorced in January 2018.

Raju was granted the son's custody and Saritha Ramaraju received visitation rights, according to court records. —*PTI*

Customs changes to raise importer costs, says GTRI

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Recent amendments to customs regulations may complicate the importing process for businesses availing concessional duties under free trade agreements (FTAs), according to the economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI). Issued on March 18 by the Ministry of Finance, the changes to the Customs (Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements) Rules, 2020 (CAROTAR) replace "Certificate of Origin" with the broader term "Proof of Origin." GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava highlighted the potential challenges, noting that this could hinder imports of electronics, white goods, and auto components, particularly from ASEAN countries, which may now face increased scrutiny. —*PTI*

India imports 847K tonnes of DAP from China

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India has imported 847,000 tonnes of diammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser from China up to February in the current fiscal year, accounting for 19.17 per cent of the country's total DAP imports of 4.42 million tonnes during this period, according to government data. This marks a decline from the previous fiscal year, when imports from China totalled 2.23 million tonnes, roughly 40 per cent of India's overall DAP imports of 5.57 million tonnes. DAP is the second most widely used fertiliser in India, following urea, with additional imports coming from Russia, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Jordan. For the ongoing rabi season, domestic DAP availability has surpassed the estimated requirement of 5.2 million tonnes, with 4.8 million tonnes already sold. As of 11 March, India held a closing stock of 943,000 tonnes of DAP. The domestic production of DAP is hampered by various factors, including high inventory, raw material shortages, and natural disaster disruptions. —*PTI*

Businesses rush to register on TReDS ahead of MSME

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Companies with an annual turnover exceeding Rs 250 crore are rapidly registering on the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) platform ahead of the MSME ministry's deadline of 31 March 2025. A government notification mandates that all companies surpassing this revenue threshold, alongside Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) procuring from MSMEs, must register on TReDS by the deadline. Following the MSME Ministry's notification on 7 November 2024, onboarding requests have significantly increased. M1xchange director Sundeep Mohindru reported that monthly corporate onboardings surged from about 30 to over 60 post-announcement, with 200 new corporates registering in the first half of FY25 and an additional 400 in the latter half. Established in 2015 by the Reserve Bank, TReDS improves timely payments to the MSME sector. —*PTI*

₹25,200 crore committed by 35 steel firms: Centre

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Around 35 companies have shown interest in the second round of the PLI scheme for specialty steel, with commitment of Rs 25,200 crore investment, according to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The Ministry of Steel is in the process of selection and signing MoUs with these companies, as per the commerce ministry. The ministry said an incentive of Rs 3,600 crore is estimated to be disbursed to these projects. The Ministry of Steel estimates that an incentive of Rs 2,000 crore will be disbursed by the end of the scheme tenure, as per the ministry's release. Centre has approved a total of 764 applications under the Production Linked Incentive Scheme for 14 key sectors. —*ANI*

India imposes anti-dumping duties on Chinese imports

Aims to protect domestic industries from unfair practices

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India has taken decisive action to shield its domestic manufacturers by imposing anti-dumping duties on four Chinese products, including vacuum flasks and aluminium foil. This move comes as part of the government's efforts to combat the influx of cheap imports that threaten local industries.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, part of the Department of Revenue, announced that the duties were imposed due to findings that several products, specifically Soft Ferrite Cores, certain thicknesses of vacuum insulated flasks, aluminium foil, and Trichloro Isocyanuric Acid, were being exported from China at prices below normal market rates.

In a series of official notifications, the government indicated that the anti-dumping duties would be levied for a period of five years on the three products: Soft Ferrite Cores, vacuum insulated flasks, and Trichloro Isocyanuric Acid. Notably, a provisional duty of up to USD 873 per tonne has also been established for aluminium foil, set to last for six months.

PHOTO: X

The specific duties range considerably, with the government imposing charges of USD 276 to USD 986 per tonne on the Trichloro Isocyanuric Acid, a chemical commonly used in water treatment. For Soft Ferrite Cores—essential components in electric vehicles, chargers, and telecom devices—up to 35 per cent duty has been applied based on the cost, insurance, and freight (CIF) value. In the case of vacuum insulated flasks, an anti-dumping duty of USD 1,732 per tonne has been enforced.

These duties were adopted following recommendations made by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), the commerce ministry's investigation arm. Such anti-dumping inquiries are conducted to ascertain whether domestic industries suffer due to an overabundance of low-priced imports. Under the multilateral regime established by the Geneva-based World Trade Organization, countries can impose these duties to foster fair trade and promote an equitable environment for local producers against foreign competition.

- The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs announced that the duties were imposed due to findings that several products, specifically Soft Ferrite Cores, certain thicknesses of vacuum insulated flasks, aluminium foil, and Trichloro Isocyanuric Acid, were being exported from China at prices below normal market rates

India has previously imposed anti-dumping duties on various products to mitigate the impacts of cheap imports, particularly from China, which remains India's second-largest trading partner. The trade deficit between the two nations reached USD 85 billion in the 2023-24 fiscal year, raising serious concerns for Indian authorities. —*PTI*

EYES ON US FED RATES

Russia–Ukraine peace hopes ease FPI outflows

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

PHOTO: X

The Indian equity market has experienced a reduction in selling pressure from Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs), with outflows narrowing to Rs 1,794 crore (approximately USD 194 million) last week. This shift comes against a backdrop of easing global concerns and a growing sense of optimism regarding a potential de-escalation in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. However, this marks the 15th consecutive week of outflows from Indian equities.

Analysts suggest that FPIs are likely to remain cautious as they await clearer signals on the US Federal Reserve's interest rate policy, geopolitical developments, and India's domestic economic outlook. Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director of Manager Research at Morningstar Investment, reported that FPIs have divested equity shares worth Rs 1,794 crore for the week ending 21 March, a decrease from the Rs 4,600 crore outflow seen during the preceding week.

Notably, FPIs turned net buyers on two occasions last week, with significant purchases amounting to Rs 3,181 crore on 21 March and Rs 710 crore on 19 March. Geojit Investment Services Chief Investment Strategist VK Vijayakumar said, "The recent reversal in FPI selling has improved market sentiment, contributing to a rally for the week ended 21 March."

Positive domestic factors, including a better-than-expected trade deficit and a boost in consumption driven by Chinese stimulus, have bolstered investor confidence. Furthermore, expectations of a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve have encouraged FPIs to selectively re-enter Indian equities, despite withdrawing Rs 31,719 crore from the market in March alone. —*PTI*

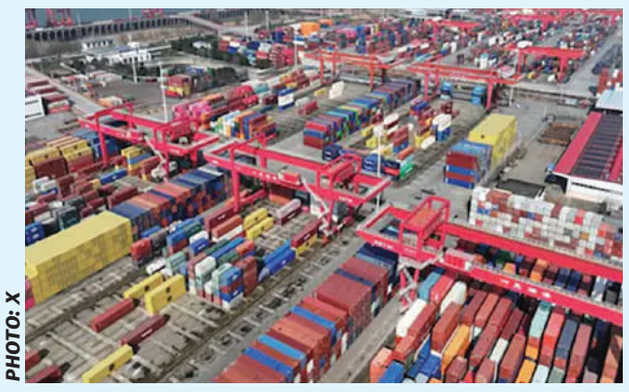


PHOTO: X

India to drive 6% of global trade growth; 3rd after US

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India will make a significant strides in the global trade over the next five years, contributing about 6 per cent in the world's trade growth, just behind China at 12 per cent and the United States at 10 per cent, as per a joint report by DHL and the New York University Stern School of Business.

The latest DHL Trade Atlas 2025 anticipates that in five years, India will retain its third-place rank on the scale dimension as well as jump 15 spots to the 17th position on the speed dimension as its compound annual trade volume growth rate rises from 5.2 per cent to 7.2 per cent.

The report highlighted that India was only the 13th largest participant in international trade in 2024, but its trade volume grew at a 5.2 per cent compound annual rate from 2019 to 2024, while global trade grew at only a 2.0per cent rate.

"India's rapid trade growth reflected both its swift macroeconomic growth and its increasing participation in international trade," the report added.

"The Trade Atlas underlines India's rapid expansion in global trade, positioning the country as a critical hub connecting the east and west. While we anticipate trade volume growth and an increase in global trade share, we remain cautiously optimistic about the future given the global economy's general volatility," said R S Subramanian, SVP South Asia, DHL Express.

Interestingly, the report says that while China is often viewed as a more trade-oriented economy than India, "India's goods trade-to-GDP ratio was almost as high as China's in 2023, and India's trade intensity exceeded China's when considering trade in both goods and services." —*PTI*

FINANCIAL GROWTH

Public sector banks' dividend payout soars by 33% in FY24

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Public Sector Banks (PSBs) have reported a remarkable 33 per cent increase in their dividend payouts, totalling Rs 27,830 crore for the fiscal year 2023-24. This marks a significant improvement in the financial health of these institutions compared to Rs 20,964 crore in the previous year, according to government data.

Of the total dividend, a substantial 65 per cent, amounting to Rs 18,013 crore, was distributed to the government, reflecting its shareholding in PSBs. In the fiscal year 2022-23, the government received Rs 13,804 crore in dividends from these banks, including the State Bank of India (SBI).

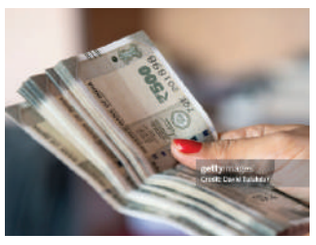


PHOTO: X

The robust financial performance of 12 public sector banks is highlighted by an unprecedented aggregate net profit of Rs 1.41 lakh crore in 2023-24, up from Rs 1.05 lakh crore in the previous fiscal year. Notably, market leader SBI contributed over 40 per cent to this figure, posting a profit of Rs 61,077 crore, which is a 22 per cent increase from Rs 50,232 crore in FY23.

Among the standout performers, Punjab National Bank achieved the highest growth in net profit at 228 per cent, reaching Rs 8,245 crore. Union Bank of India followed with a 62 per cent increase to Rs 13,649 crore, while Central Bank of India saw a 61 per cent rise to Rs 2,549 crore. Other significant gains were recorded by Bank of India, Bank of Maharashtra, and Indian Bank, each exceeding a 50 per cent increase. —*PTI*

Forex reserves rise by $305M

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India's foreign exchange reserves rose USD 305 million to USD 654.271 billion in the week that ended on March 14.

The previous week witnessed the highest weekly gains in over three years.

Prior to that, forex reserves had slumped for about four months, recently hitting an 11-month low. Then followed the latest rollercoaster movement, with gains some weeks and declines the next.

Forex reserves started falling after touching an all-time high of USD 704.89 billion in September. They are now about 7 percent lower from their peak.

PHOTO: X

The decline in reserves was most likely due to RBI intervention, aimed at preventing a sharp depreciation of the Rupee. The Indian Rupee is now at or near its all-time low against the US dollar.

The latest RBI data showed that India's foreign currency assets (FCA), the largest component of forex reserves, stood at USD 557.186 billion.

Gold reserves currently amount to USD 74.391 billion, according to RBI data.

Estimates suggest that India's foreign exchange reserves are sufficient to cover approximately 10-11 months of projected imports.

In 2023, India added around USD 58 billion to its foreign exchange reserves, contrasting with a cumulative decline of USD 71 billion in 2022. In 2024, the reserves rose by a little over USD 20 billion.

Foreign exchange reserves, or FX reserves, are assets held by a nation's central bank or monetary authority. —*ANI*

Housing sales fall by 23% in top 9 cities in Q1 2025: PropEquity

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

The housing market continued its downward trend with housing sales in India's top nine cities falling by 23 per cent while supply declined by a whopping 34 per cent in Jan-March of 2025, said a report by data analytics firm PropEquity.

Housing sales in Q1 2025 stood at 1,05,791 units as compared to 1,36,702 units in the same period last year. Except in Bengaluru and Delhi-NCR, all seven cities witnessed a decline in sales.

Housing supply, on the other hand, stood at 80,774 units in Q1 2025 as compared to 1,22,365 units in the same period last year, marking three consecutive quarters of under-1 lakh units launched. Except in Bengaluru, all eight cities saw a decline in new supply in the first quarter.

Samir Jasuja, Founder & CEO, PropEquity said, "The rise in home prices and caution on the part of investors due to geo-political developments and certain weaknesses in the Indian economy have resulted in a drop in sales."

He said traditionally high-supply markets such as Hyderabad, Pune and Thane continue to decline. These had the highest supply among all tier-1 cities for two years running 2022 and 2023, before touching a low in 2024. —*ANI*

PHOTO: X

GOLI SODA RESURGES IN GLOBAL MARKETS AS GOLI POP SODA

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

India's beloved beverage Goli Soda is experiencing a resurgence in key international markets, including the US, UK, Europe, and the Gulf, thanks to strategic expansion and innovative marketing, according to an official statement released on Sunday.

In collaboration with Fair Exports, Goli Soda has been successfully rebranded as Goli Pop Soda and is now available at Lulu Hypermarket, one of the largest retail chains in the Gulf region, as confirmed by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA).

"This iconic beverage, once a household favourite, is making a remarkable comeback on the global stage," the statement highlighted, noting its successful trial shipments to various countries. The revival is significant, as the drink had nearly vanished amid rising competition from multinational beverage companies.

A key feature distinguishing Goli Pop Soda is its innovative packaging, which includes a unique pop opener that evokes nostalgia for Indian consumers. This rebranding strategy has garnered attention in international markets, positioning the product as trendy and exciting.

The rising demand for Goli Pop Soda indicates that authentic Indian flavours can rival international brands, opening new avenues for domestic exports and marking a milestone in India's efforts to promote its homegrown food and beverage products globally. —*PTI*

RUPEE FALL A KEY FACTOR

Car prices to rise from April as costs increase

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Car buyers in India will face increased prices from April as major automakers, including Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra & Mahindra and Hyundai, announce hikes due to escalating input costs and operational expenses.

Market leader Maruti Suzuki plans to raise prices across its entire model range by up to 4 per cent. The company offers a variety of models, from the entry-level Alto K-10 to the multi-purpose vehicle Invicto, with prices currently ranging from Rs 4.23 lakh to Rs 29.22 lakh (ex-showroom Delhi).

Hyundai Motor India will increase prices by up to 3 per cent, attributing the decision to rising raw material and operational costs. Tata Motors is also set to raise prices for its passenger vehicle range, including electric vehicles, for the second time this year, while Mahindra & Mahindra will increase prices of its SUVs and commercial vehicles by up to 3 per cent.

PHOTO: X

Other manufacturers, including Kia India, Honda Cars India, Renault India, and BMW, have also announced price hikes.

Rajat Mahajan, Deloitte Partner and Automotive Sector Leader, said carmakers typically implement two price increases annually – one at the start of the calendar year and another at the beginning of the fiscal year.

He noted that the depreciating rupee against the US dollar and increasing operational costs are significant factors behind the hikes.

Mahajan also pointed to tepid demand for entry-level vehicles, particularly from first-time buyers and rural customers, as putting pressure on profit margins. However, he observed that price sensitivity is lower in premium segments, allowing for better margin improvement.

ICRA Corporate Ratings' Vice President, Rohan Kanwar Gupta, echoed the sentiment, stating that the price hikes are primarily to counter inflation and rising commodity prices, although he anticipates only a modest impact on demand due to existing discounts in the market. —*PTI*

ONGC to import ethane to meet LNG demands

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has announced plans to begin importing ethane from mid-2028 to adjust for changes in the composition of liquefied natural gas (LNG) received from Qatar. The state-owned firm has released a tender detailing this strategic shift.

Currently, India imports 7.5 million tonnes of LNG annually from Qatar. Under the existing agreement, QatarEnergy supplies 5 million tonnes per year, which includes methane—used in electricity generation, fertiliser production, and for cooking—as well as ethane and propane, which serve as feedstock for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and petrochemicals. The contract will expire in 2028, and a revised agreement signed last year stipulates that QatarEnergy will supply 'lean' gas, which lacks ethane and propane.

In response to the impending changes, ONGC has invested approximately Rs 1,500 crore to establish a C2 (ethane) and C3 (propane) extraction plant in Dahej, Gujarat. The extracted C2 and C3 will be utilised as feedstock by ONGC's petrochemical subsidiary, ONGC Petro additions Ltd. —*ANI*

PHOTO: X

If offered SA captaincy, I would consider: Rabada

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Premier fast bowler Kagiso Rabada will "heavily consider" captaining the South African national team if CSA offers him the top job and is not averse to the tough multi-tasking which is essential for the role. Rabada along with Jasprit Bumrah and Pat Cummins forms the great modern pace bowlers' troika. Among them, Cummins is the regular Australian captain while Bumrah has been a stop-gap leader in Tests and T20Is for India.Now, Rabada wants to join them if given the opportunity and the 29-year-old is contemplating about the mental shift he needs to make for the big responsibility."I have been asked this question quite a lot. And it's made me consider it. I think it's going to take some maturity on my side.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Diksha finishes 11th as Mimi Rhodes wins in Australia

WOLLONGONG, 23 MARCH

Diksha Dagar and Pranavi Urs dropped crucial shots near the finish and missed finishing in the top 10 of the Ford Women's NSW Open here. Diksha and Pranavi shot 1-over 72 each to finish T-11 and T-14, while another Indian Avani Prashanth also had a tough finish with a triple bogey on the 18th to finish T-36th. Australian Mimi Rhodes rode on her two early birdies on the second and the fourth and parred the rest of the way for 2-under 69 for a 17-under total that gave her a maiden Ladies European Tour title.

Mansell wins maiden DP World Tour title

SINGAPORE, 23 MARCH

Shubhankar Sharma landed a second eagle in three rounds as he carded a final round of 3-under 69 to finish a modest tied-36th in the Porsche Singapore Classic on the DP World Tour here.Up on the top, Richard Mansell holed a two-putt birdie from 100 feet to edge ahead of Keita Nakajima to win his maiden DP WorldTour title.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Valspar C'ship: Viktor Hovland part of 3-way tie

PALM HARBOR, 23 MARCH

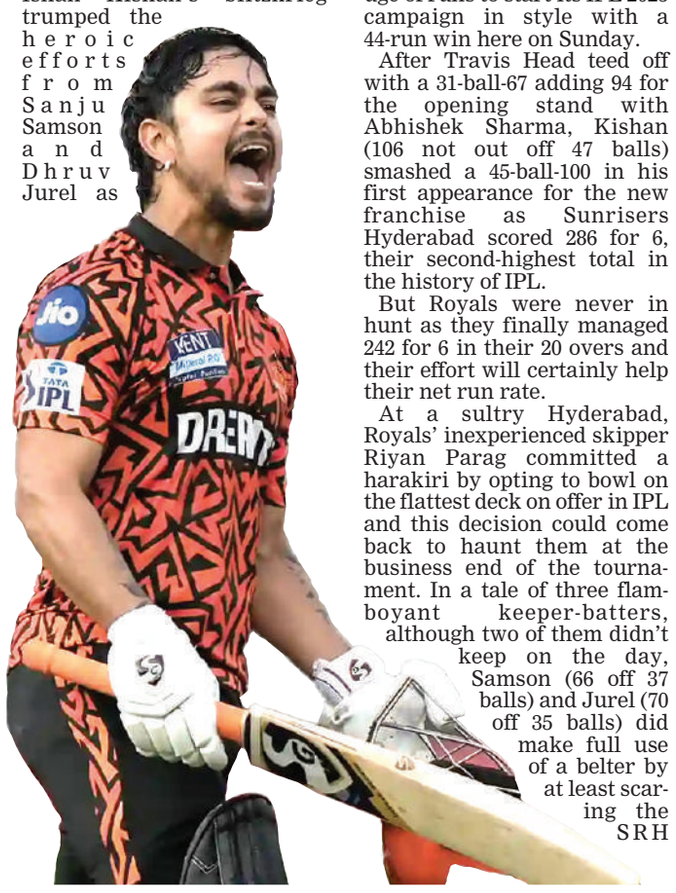
Viktor Hovland was steady amid a wild Saturday of charges and collapses at the Valspar Championship, leaving him in a three-way tie for the lead at Innisbrook with two dozen players still very much in the mix. Jacob Bridgeman showed plenty of mettle in his first time as the 36-hole leader, falling four shots behind at the turn and rallying for a 1-under 70 to share the lead with Hovland (69) and Nico Echavarria (66). They were at 7-under 206 with seemingly everyone on their heels. That includes Justin Thomas, who left on Friday hopeful he would cut. He shot 30 on the back nine for a 65, his lowest round ever on the Copperhead course at Innisbrook—*PTI*

Kishan's ton helps SRH start with a bang

Ishan smashed a 45-ball-100 in his first appearance

HYDERABAD, 23 MARCH

Ishan Kishan's blitzkrieg trumped the heroic efforts from Sanju Samson and Dhruv Jurel as Sunrisers Hyderabad buried Rajasthan Royals under a deluge of runs to start its IPL 2025 campaign in style with a 44-run win here on Sunday.



After Travis Head teed off with a 31-ball-67 adding 94 for the opening stand with Abhishek Sharma, Kishan (106 not out off 47 balls) smashed a 45-ball-100 in his first appearance for the new franchise as Sunrisers Hyderabad scored 286 for 6, their second-highest total in the history of IPL.

But Royals were never in hunt as they finally managed 242 for 6 in their 20 overs and their effort will certainly help their net run rate.

At a sultry Hyderabad, Royals' inexperienced skipper Riyan Parag committed a harakiri by opting to bowl on the flattest deck on offer in IPL and this decision could come back to haunt them at the business end of the tournament. In a tale of three flamboyant keeper-batters, although two of them didn't keep on the day, Samson (66 off 37 balls) and Jurel (70 off 35 balls) did make full use of a belter by at least scaring the SRH fans during a stand of 111 in just 9.5 overs.

While Sunrisers were always favourites to win the run-fest, the match decisively turned in two overs --11th bowled by Adam Zampa (1/48 in 4 overs) and 12th sent down by skipper Pat Cummins (0/60 in 4 overs) which yielded only seven runs cumulatively.

Pacer Harshal Patel (2/34 in 4 overs) understated brilliance at the back end also needs an honourable mention.

The difference became the number of dot balls consumed in the end.

While Royals managed only 25 dot balls during SRH innings, Cummins and his men were able to bowl 15 more.

Sunrisers Hyderabad 286 for 6 (Kishan 106*, Head 67, Deshpande 3-44) beat Rajasthan Royals 242 for 6 (Jurel 70, Samson 66, Simarjeet 2-46) by 44 runs. —*PTI*

Denied an opportunity to end his ODI career at the Champions Trophy due to a suspect bowling action

-Shakib Al Hasan, Bangladesh veteran

SHARDUL THAKUR TO JOIN LSG AFTER MOHSIN RULED OUT

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

After going unsold in the auction, seam bowling all-rounder Shardul Thakur is set to return to the IPL with Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) roping him in as a replacement for Mohsin Khan, who was ruled out owing to an injury.

Under new captain Rishabh Pant, LSG will begin their campaign against Delhi Capitals on Monday.

"The Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) have named Shardul Thakur as a replacement for left-arm fast bowler Mohsin Khan, who has been ruled out of the 18th season of the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) due to injury," IPL said in a statement.

"Thakur, an experienced all-rounder, has been signed from the Registered Available Player Pool (RAPP) at his reserve price of INR 2 crore.

"A proven performer across all three formats for India, he brings valuable IPL experience, having played 95 matches for five franchises." —*PTI*

Noor makes dream debut for CSK as MI struggles to 155/9

CHENNAI, 23 MARCH

Afghanistan mystery spinner Noor Ahmad made a memorable debut for Chennai Super Kings as his four-wicket haul limited Mumbai Indians to a below-par 155/9 in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday. Ahmad (4/18) ran through the Mumbai Indians middle-order after Khaleel Ahmed (3/29) removed openers Rohit Sharma (0 off 4) and Ryan Rickelton (13 off 7) in the powerplay.On a typical Chepauk surface, CSK got the early breakthroughs after putting the opposition into bat.

Rohit was the first one to depart, flicking straight into the hands of Shivam Dube at mid-wicket off Khaleel.Playing his first game for Mumbai Indians, Rickelton looked good in his brief cameo which ended when he played on to give Khaleel his second wicket. R Ashwin, returning to CSK after 10 years, struck in his first over to make it 36 for three as Will Jacks offered a simple catch to Dube at mid-off.Surykumar Yadav (29 off 26) and the in-form Tilak Varma (31 off 25) forged a 51-run partnership to take the innings forward before the M S Dhoni effected a lightening quick stumping off Ahmad to send back Mumbai Indians stand-in captain. Dhoni showed he remains as sharp as ever behind the stumps with bails being dislodged even before Suryakumar could complete his bat swing. **Mumbai Indians**: 155 for 9 in 20 overs. (T Varma 31, S Yadav 29, D Chahar 28 not out; K Ahmed 3/29, Noor Ahmad 4/18). —*PTI*

We don't need to panic, after their heavy loss to Royal Challengers Bangalore

- Ajinkya Rahane, Kolkata Knight Riders skipper

Krunal Pandya a smart pick; there's something special about RCB this year

-Matthew Hayden, Australian great

Top seeds Zverev, Sabalenka advance; Draper knocked out

DUBAI, 23 MARCH

World number one Aryna Sabalenka reached the last 16 at the Miami Open when Elena-Gabriela Ruse retired injured on Saturday, while men's top seed Alexander Zverev beat Jacob Fearnley 6-2, 6-4 to reach the third round.

Sabalenka, who arrived in Miami fresh off a loss in last week's Indian Wells final, wrapped up the first set 6-1 before Romanian Ruse was forced to retire with a right thigh injury. Up next for three-time Grand Slam champion Sabalenka will be American defending champion Danielle Collins, who beat Swiss qualifier Rebeka Masarova 6-4, 3-6, 6-3.Naomi Osaka won 7-6(6), 3-6, 6-4 against American wild card Hailey Baptiste to set up a clash with Italian sixth seed Jasmine Paolini, who advanced when Ons Jabeur, trailing 4-3 in the opening set. —*PTI*

Haaland helps Norway campaign with 5-0 rout

WASHINGTON, 23 MARCH

Erling Haaland helped Norway make a positive start to its World Cup qualifying campaign by scoring in a 5-0 rout at Moldova.

Norway's third and last World Cup appearance was back in 1998, two years before Haaland was born.

Now, Haaland leads a team featuring Arsenal midfielder Martin Odegaard that bears high expectations of reaching the 2026 tournament in the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

The Scandinavian side is favored to win Group I, which also saw Israel beat Estonia 2-1 in the opening round.

Haaland scored Norway's second goal against the outmatched Moldova. That took his exceptional career haul to 39 goals in 40 appearances for his country since his 2019 debut.

Dortmund defender Julian Ryerson opened the scoring for Norway five minutes after kickoff in Chisinau. Haaland doubled the lead in the 23rd. Thelo Aasgaard, who assisted Ryerson for the opener, made it three before Odegaard set up Alexander Sorloth before halftime.

Substitute Aron Donnum got on the scoreboard in the second half.

Haaland already knows what it is to win the Champions League. —*PTI*

DC and LSG aim for strong IPL start under new leadership

VISAKHAPATNAM, 23 MARCH

With their respective leaders switching camps and squads undergoing major overhauls, both Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants, under new captains, will be eager to make a strong start to their IPL campaign when they face off here on Monday.

For a second year, Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA Stadium will host two home matches for Delhi Capitals.

Pant, who had been a Delhi Capitals' player throughout his IPL career and also their captain, left the franchise ahead of the mega auction last year and was snapped up by LSG for a record price of Rs 27 crore.

His pay cheque will keep the Indian wicketkeeper-batter in as he didn't get a game during the recent Champions Trophy.

PHOTO: PTI

On the other hand, KL Rahul, who led LSG for two years since their IPL debut, has switched to Delhi Capitals, where he would be a vital cog in their plans, not as a leader but as a key batting mainstay, with Indian all-rounder Axar Patel being appointed captain.

DC VS LSG
Head To Head
PLAYED: 5
DC Won: 2
LSG Won: 3

Like Mumbai Indians, DC was spoilt for choices when it came to picking their captain as they also have Faf du Plessis apart from Rahul but the franchise opted for all-round Patel, whose career graph has been on the rise.

Overall, on paper, the Capitals come across as a formidable unit for the rich mix of overseas and Indian players, while LSG has only six overseas players in their roster to work with.

DC vs LSG
Match starts at
7.30 pm IST

Along with the vast experience of du Plessis in the batting line-up, Delhi Capitals also have Australian speedster Mitchell Starc who is coming into this IPL fresh off a break that saw him missing the Champions Trophy.

Karun Nair's rich form in the domestic circuit makes Delhi's middle order appear dangerous, which also boasts of Rahul, Tristan Stubbs, Sameer Rizvi, and the big-hitting Ashutosh Sharma. —*PTI*

ALLEN, DUFFY LEAD ROUT OF PAK TO SEAL SERIES WIN FOR NZ

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, 23 MARCH

Pacers Jacob Duffy and Zakary Foulkes shared seven wickets as New Zealand bowled out Pakistan for 105 Sunday to win the fourth Twenty20 international by 115 runs and clinch victory in the five-match series with a game remaining.

Duffy took 4-20 and Foulkes 3-25 as New Zealand's pacers thrived in responsive conditions under the floodlights at Bay Oval and bowled out Pakistan in 16.2 overs.

At 56-8, Pakistan was in danger of falling short of its lowest score in T20 internationals 74 against Australia in 2012. But Abdul Samad made an unbeaten 44 to steer his team past that total and, at 91, past its lowest total against New Zealand.

Earlier, Finn Allen made a half-century from 19 balls and captain Michael Bracewell made an unbeaten 46 as New Zealand posted 220-6 after being sent in.

Finn Allen PHOTO: X

Tim Seifert made 44 from 22 balls to dominate an opening partnership with Allen that produced 59 runs in 4.1 overs. New Zealand went on to 79-1 after six overs, its highest power play total against Pakistan.

Allen hit six fours and three sixes to accelerate the New Zealand scoring: the home team was 134-2 at the midpoint of its innings.

Haris Rauf took 3-27 to curb the New Zealand scoring before Bracewell finished strongly.

New Zealand 220 for 6 (Allen 50, Bracewell 46*, Seifert 44, Rauf 3-27) beat Pakistan 105 all out (Samad 44, Duffy 4-20, Foulkes 3-25) by 115 runs—*PTI*

Sandhu falters to finish tied 26th; Ortiz wins Macau title

MACAU, 23 MARCH

Yuvraj Sandhu faltered in the final round with a 3-over 73 and finished tied-26th after having been in the top 10 after three rounds at the International Series here.

Sandhu, who was 69-65-67 on the first three days, ended at 6-under.

Mexico's Carlos Ortiz held off Patrick Reed to claim the title after a close battle between the LIV Golf stars at the Macau Golf and Country Club.

Sandhu had two bogeys and a double bogey and just one birdie during the round.

Among other Indians, Anirban Lahiri (67) finished T-40 with a total of 4-under, while Gaganjeet Bhullar (73) at 1-over for the week was T-63 and Shiv Kapur (70) with 6-over total was T-76.

Ortiz won the International Series Oman last year and made it win number two on The International Series and Asian Tour today after closing with a six-under-par 64 to finish three ahead of Reed on 22-under.

Reed, looking to add this week's title to his win at the Link Hong Kong Open last November, fired a 67, as did fellow American Jason Kokrak, three back in third.

The trio booked their berths for The Open at Royal Portrush this summer. —*PTI*

Carlos Ortiz PHOTO: X

THIRD CAREER WIN

Piastri wins Chinese Grand Prix, leads McLaren 1-2

SHANGHAI, 23 MARCH

McLaren driver Oscar Piastri cruised to his maiden Chinese Grand Prix win from pole position with the Australian untouchable ahead of his teammate Lando Norris as the pair completed McLaren's milestone 50th one-two placing in Formula 1.

Piastri, who took his maiden pole position on Saturday, got a great start in Sunday's race to lead into the first corner, as Norris passed George Russell's Mercedes for second.

The Australian then slowly stretched his legs in an untroubled drive for his third career win, after Hungary and Azerbaijan last year.

McLaren's Oscar Piastri celebrates with a trophy PHOTO: X

"(It's) very satisfying, obviously," said Piastri, who is now up to fourth in the standings, just 10 points behind leader Norris with 22 races to go.

"I think it's always a pretty good day when you cross the line first, but I think this has been the most satisfying, not just race, but (race) weekend for myself. I think the two wins I had previously were very different, and I think this one's been the most complete."

Norris had a trickier afternoon to earn his runner-up spot — with the British driver having to pass both Russell and Williams' Alex Albon after his stop. He then trailed his teammate to the checkered flag, though in the closing stages had to deal with a worsening brake-pedal issue that threatened his ability to finish the race.

"Tough race," Norris said. "I mean I'm just satisfied, for the result, for the team, the 50th one-two for McLaren is quite an achievement. —*PTI*

Priyanka sets 35km event national record in Slovakia

NEW DELHI, 23 MARCH

Commonwealth Games medallist race walker Priyanka Goswami set a national record in women's 35km event during the Dudinska 50 competition in Dudince, Slovakia.

Goswami clocked 2:56:34 on Saturday to finish 11th in the 44th edition of Dudinska 50, a World Athletics Race Walking Tour Gold Label meet that is held annually on the streets of Dudince in March. Her previous personal best was 3:13:19.

A two-time Olympian, Goswami bettered the previous national record of 2:57:54 set by Manju Rani at the 2023 National Open Race Walking Championships in Ranchi.

Paula Milena Torres of Ecuador won the women's 35km race walk event with a time of 2:44:26. Peru's Kimberly García (2:45:59) and Poland's Katarzyna Zdziebło (2:46:59) took the second and third positions respectively. The 29-year-old Goswami also holds the 20km race walk national record of 1:28:45, which she had set at the 2021 National Race Walking Championships in Ranchi. —*PTI*